

AUTUMN 1998

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CONFERENCE

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The image features a minimalist abstract design. A large white circle is the central element, partially obscured by several solid black rectangular blocks. One block is in the top-left, another is in the middle-right, and two more are at the bottom. The word 'CONFERENCE' is printed in white, bold, uppercase letters within a white rectangular border on the black block in the middle-right. Below this, the text 'VOLUME 8, No. 1' and 'AUTUMN 1998' is printed in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, separated by a thin white horizontal line.

CONFERENCE

VOLUME 8, No. 1
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CONFERENCE

TO THE READER:

In your hands is issue one of the eighth volume of Conference. No doubt regular readers will notice three major changes. First, gone are many of the previous editors, some to permanent positions in academia, others to itinerant-adjunct status, a poor, hard spot between a tenure-track position and a high-paying job outside the University. Call it the curse of Herzog.

Second, and more importantly, is the modest shift in content and the addition of structure. Previously, an issue would consist of one interview of some notable thinker...or maybe two, and four or five papers on assorted subjects in philosophy or literature. The best pieces submitted to Conference were those published. Laudable though this be, the result was issues lacking in balance. Aggregation does not a good journal make. One issue might be filled with essays on epistemology while the next might center on topics in post-structuralism. The upshot, obviously, was that a few readers were delighted because the topic *du issue* was their main interest, while all other readers were alienated.

To remedy this, Conference journal has adopted a structure. Each issue will have an interview, book reviews, and sections devoted to philosophy (Philosopher's Corner) and literature (Bard). There also will be a section devoted to current affairs.

Which brings me to the third problem. By focusing so intently on hot topics in philosophy and literature, Conference unnecessarily limited readership. Like so many other scholarly journals, Conference nearly became academic in the pejorative sense, of interest only to those who kept up on these complex, cutting-edge subjects. Worse, by addressing a small clique or two of thinkers, Conference fell in line with the current trend in American universities—specialization to the point of utter fragmentation and discipline-solipsism.

The answer, obviously, is not to dumb down the journal, but to carry these pieces and articles accessible to a broader readership. This will be achieved partly by publishing articles that ask more general questions (e.g., how to make sense of this text?—See Dostoevski: Love & the Underground Man). Moreover, the addition of the Current Affairs section is designed to draw in those studying anthropology, politics, and the myriad other human sciences who are interested in matters beyond their department's walls. Fittingly, the first topics of Current Affairs, welfare reform and discourse between disciplines, are matters we all can ponder and discuss. Hopefully, in reaching out to others in the University on these topics, we can elicit their thoughts on our main subjects, philosophy and literature. Such seems the proper goal for a journal named Conference.

—Kevin R. Kosar

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STATEMENT OF MISSION

Conference is an interdisciplinary journal of philosophy and theory produced by graduate students at the City University of New York Graduate Center, Columbia University, Fordham University, the New School for Social Research and New York University. We hold no particular theoretical or policy positions and accept submissions from any school of thought. We encourage submissions in all scholarly, theoretical areas, especially those which either strike new paths or encourage cross-disciplinary discussion. We welcome any students from the New York Consortium universities to join our effort to build a conference across the manifold fields of human inquiry.

SUBMISSIONS TO CONFERENCE

Submissions to Conference should be in triplicate, with a single cover sheet including the author's name, university, department of enrollment, home address and phone number. Submissions should be double-spaced, have endnotes, and ought not exceed twenty pages. Please send submissions or correspondence to: Conference, c/o Department of Politics, Kevin R. Kosar, 715 Broadway, Floor 4, New York, NY 10003.

Those desiring to submit visual art, fiction, or poetry should first submit a letter to the aforementioned address detailing the nature and value of the proposed submission. Anyone desiring to join Conference should also write the above address.

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Welfare: The Past, Present, and Future

By
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Jesus reportedly said, "The poor will always be with you." For two millennia authorities ecclesiastical and political have differed over how to contend with this brute fact. The way a society treats its poor is very much a function of its perceptions of the poor. If the poor are thought to be vicious and immoral, authorities will drive them from town, jail them, or let them suffer their lot. If the poor are perceived as victims of racial oppression or a downturn in the economy, authorities will offer them assistance.

Such, in a nutshell, is the range of perceptions and corresponding public policy that the United States has taken toward the impoverished. The welfarism which reached its height under Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency has in the past decade fallen into discredit. Now America is vociferously debating a new paradigm for dealing with the presence of the poor. In light of this, Conference is pleased to present this interview with Professor Lawrence M. Mead of New York University's Department of Politics.

Professor Mead teaches public policy and American government. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard, Princeton, and the University of Wisconsin. Professor Mead's expertise is poverty and the politics surrounding the issue. Possessing a wealth of government service experience and the author of numerous articles on the poor, Professor Mead most recently edited, *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty*, and *From Welfare to Work: Lessons from America*. Presently he is researching Wisconsin's much-touted workfare program. In 1986 his *Beyond Entitlement: the Social Obligations of Citizenship* was published and instantly set Washington D.C. politicians, policy analysts, and pundits buzzing over its sharp critique of the LBJ model of welfare and its call for a new "paternalistic" model. With over a decade past since its splash, Kevin R. Kosar of NYU asks Professor Mead to reflect on *Beyond Entitlement* and assess the present debate on welfare.

Conference: Why did *Beyond Entitlement* cause such a stir?

Lawrence Mead: I think because it was the first social policy book which focused unambiguously upon the obligations and needs of the poor instead of their rights. The book managed to capture at the theoretical level a mindset that was coming to fruition at the time. The idea being that social policy should be based upon the idea of a social contract where the recipients of welfare do something in return for their benefits. That attitude is very prominent in American public opinion. The idea isn't an original one, but among policy experts I was the first take it seriously and provide a sustained meditation on it.

CF: Precisely what problem does Beyond Entitlement address and what is your remedy?

LM: The thesis is that the American poverty problem is due in large part to the moral character of government social policy. Federal social policy is permissive in character. It gives people benefits but does not expect that they function in ways people normally do in society. Specifically, the government gives money to many people who do not work though they are able to work. And we reward people for behavior that is contrary to their own interests let alone the interests of society. That includes all the behaviors that cause people to become dependent upon government- crime, drug addiction and all the other forms of failure to function.

CF: On what grounds had the debate previously been?

LM: The previous debate was always centered on the scale of the benefits, with the academics and left saying that the poor needed more government benefits and the right saying they needed less. I said the question is not the scale but the character of the benefits given. I wanted people to ask if benefits ought to be given with no strings attached or if they ought require something

from the recipient. I asked that our thinking on these issues go beyond entitlement- entitlement being understood as a government assistance program based solely on income alone without any conditions on behavior.

CF: In *The Dream & the Nightmare*¹, Myron Magnet offers a different take on the poverty problem. His was a cultural thesis, that leftist, elite ideas unleashed during the liberation movements of the 1960's trickled into the minds of a great many of the poor. The libertine life of sex, drugs, and rock and roll results in rampant drug addiction, crime, teenage pregnancy, and fatherless children among the poor. So, Magnet declares, moral renewal is the answer to the problem of the poor.

LM: Yes, Myron believes that the permissive force which leads to the dissolution of inner-cities is popular culture, the ways of living and thinking popularized by Hollywood, the media, and counter-culture thinkers of the 1960's. This culture stresses immediate self-gratification and does not honor virtue. This is why the poor have disproportionately succumbed to crime, drug addiction, unwed pregnancies, and so forth...Now I differ with Myron in that I'm not so sure popular culture is permissive. I agree that Hollywood is permissive, but I've found that social attitudes are conservative about personal behavior.

CF: We hear much of a moral collapse amongst the poor, some like to cite as evidence the great drop in church membership amongst the poor.

LM: Yes, there is something to this thesis. But I also think it has very little to do with public policy. In public policy you need to find levers which government controls. The enforcement of moral values has broken down in the inner cities, but unlike Myron I don't find evidence that the values themselves have dissolved. I don't see people living Bohemian lives because they have taken up these new

permissive values. What I see is people who want to live straight, who don't want to live like Bohemians, but who nonetheless tolerate such behavior in themselves, their families, and others. They tolerate it because they don't feel that they can live the straight life in the situation they are in. So it is not the values that are permissive but the lifestyle which is permissive. It fails to conform to their beliefs. Public institutions have particularly failed in their duty to enforce values. We're not talking about controversial values like abortion or the right to life. We're talking about the work ethic, obedience to the law, staying in school, working for a living, things like this. Those values aren't controversial. Everyone supports them. But the breakdown of public authority has made living according to these values very difficult.

CF: Which institutions are at fault?

LM: Three institutions have failed. Law enforcement has failed to keep people safe, the schools have failed to enforce learning, and the federal government has failed to enforce the work ethic by allowing people to get paid without working.

CF: So there is much to James Q. Wilson's "broken-window theory"- that nobody wants broken windows or quality of life crimes to occur in their neighborhood. However, when they occur, if the criminals are not swiftly punished and the windows repaired, greater crimes follow. Many small transgressions unpunished make the mind receptive to large scale disorders. And so comes a collapse into barbarism.

LM: Yes, and I agree with cultural conservatives who think that enforcing values must also be done by social organizations- churches, civic groups, the family, and other non-public organizations. But I don't think they can do much if the public institutions fail. Some people say that private groups like churches and non-profits groups alone can

bring a moral revival but I think that's a romantic fantasy. They can't do their part unless the public authorities restore order.

CF: Michael Tanner and Marvin Olasky² have blasted public efforts to do what they believe is the job of families, churches, and private groups- that is, minister to the needs of the poor. By usurping this responsibility government has replaced caring neighbors with an indifferent bureaucracy.

LM: I don't accept that government must be a corrupting force and that the private sector can take care of everything. Olasky's study is really about nineteenth-century poverty, when people suffered low wages and needed money to get them back on their feet. Otherwise these were folks with orderly lives. The poverty I'm researching is of a more desperate sort and today is more prevalent than what Olasky is talking about. I study people whose lives lack social order, the poverty we find in modern inner cities. Today the problem is more intense and of far greater magnitude. I do agree with Olasky that the character of outreach to the poor, be it the church or government, has to stress values. Those who seek to help the poor need confront people about their lifestyles and not just hand them checks.

CF: In *Beyond Entitlement* you wrote that government programs define which needs government will meet and which the people themselves must handle. The structure of benefits and obligations required of welfare recipients create an "operational definition of citizenship." Specifically, what obligations have they?

LM: These are very basic and common to all citizens. They include things like paying taxes, obeying the law, speaking English, serving in the military if drafted, serving on juries, and so forth. There are other ones that are not directly enforced but presumed by society. Most prominent is the work ethic. Adults who are not disabled need to be

employed. Public opinion does not demand utter self-reliance. The public is willing to help those who are working but fall short of earning enough to pay for their needs. What the public will not do is pay for those who can but don't work. This is an important point: when I say that certain behaviors should be required for the receipt of benefits, I am not offering my moral prescription for society. This is not personal politics being thrust on others or an attempt at micromanaging people's lives. Rather, these behaviors are the very behaviors most Americans expect. What is needed is governmental action to enforce what the people expect.

CF: Sociologist, William Julius Wilson³ might say that your thesis is all good and fine but ignores a big problem - there are too few jobs for the poor to take.

LM: That's an important criticism that comes from the left. Rather than dispute that people must work for benefits, the Left now claims that the poor can't find work due to lack of jobs or training and education. My later book, *The New Politics of Poverty*, was written in part to answer this charge by William Julius Wilson, David Elwood, and other liberals. The evidence shows that jobs are available.

CF: What of the critique that says the size of the impoverished class is due in large part to their breeding. Specifically, they have far more children than they can support and their offspring do likewise, creating an ever-burgeoning class of the poor. Why not mandate birth control for those who want welfare benefits?

LM: The evidence doesn't support the claim that the poor have large families. Three-quarters of welfare mothers have only one or two children. The average family size amongst the poor might be slightly larger than that of the better off, but not much. Yes, there has been a growth in the numbers of poor in America, but most of that is driven by immigration, specifically from Latin American countries.

CF: How big a problem is unemployment amongst the poor? Some say that drug and alcohol addiction, decrepitude, functional illiteracy, and having to care for young children keep a large number of welfare recipients from being able to work.

Specifically, the government gives money to many people who do not work though they are able to work. And we reward people for behavior that is contrary to their own interests let alone the interests of society.

LM: Perhaps one quarter of poor adults are unable to work at all. Most are able to work at least part time. This is not to say that this three-quarters can make themselves self-sufficient. No doubt some who take work will require supplemental income from government-which Americans support. But they must work.

CF: Should the government create jobs for people? Say, paying them to clean up their communities, picking up garbage, painting over graffiti, acting as posse committatus adjunct to their local police?

LM: Only if the private sector fails to create enough jobs. So far it hasn't.

CF: Philosophically, what is the American understanding of liberty? If it is, as some assert, Hobbesian, in Justice Brandeis' words, "the right to be left alone" (*Olmstead v. United States*, 277 U.S. 438, 1928), then asking

welfare recipients to work for their benefits seems an offense to liberty, a kind of moral mandate coming down from the government.

LM: I believe that liberty for Americans is essentially negative, but of course it is not unqualified. No Anglo-American theorist has ever argued that the citizen owes nothing to the state. Even in Hobbes and Locke the collectivity has the right to restrict individual liberty for the common good.

CF: True, both Hobbes and Locke agreed that the government is obliged to take personal property and redistribute it to those who might become lawless due to material desperation. Locke also advocated that vagrants be put to work and taught the rudiments of morality.

LM: The American mind is libertarian but also accepts that for there to be an economy and political action there needs to be trust. Individuals need to be able to believe that their fellow citizen will not rob them or kill them if they are to engage in common activity. Obligations come with citizenship.

CF: We agonized that nobody helped Kitty Genovese as she was being viciously murdered in the street. This would appear to show that Americans believe we are in some minimal sense our brother's keepers.

LM: Yes. The presence of government agencies which intervene in the lives of people who are being harmed or hurting themselves, like children's services and the agencies that provide assistance to the mentally ill and those addicted to drugs and alcohol, for example, shows that Americans believe they have obligations to tend to others.

CF: What of the American understanding of equality?

LM: Surveys show that Americans don't think of equality in economic terms. Equality to them means that everyone has the same rights and obligations. No matter who you are you should be punished for committing crimes. Everyone has to pay taxes, serve if drafted by the military, and so forth. Academics and intellectuals tend to think that equality should mean equality of income and status. But this isn't what Americans think. Americans are remarkably undisturbed by great disparities in wealth amongst them. What they are disturbed by is unequal treatment by government. For example, they would be deeply offended if rich people got to stand in a quicker line than the rest of us when renewing their driver's licenses. Equality is having the same essential rights and obligations- this unites Americans.

CF: So, those who can work but don't are failing to participate in the common obligations of American life, thereby placing themselves outside citizenship.

LM: This is what Americans believe. Again, being one of us requires those who can work do so. Taking checks and refusing to work is very offensive to the American way of thinking. Those who do not partake in the obligations of citizenship ought not to partake in the benefits.

CF: In the last decade, how has the debate over welfare changed?

LM: Government has become much more serious about requiring welfare recipients to work. The debate has shifted from the amount recipients are to receive to how to make them full citizens.

// So it is not the values that are permissive but the lifestyle which is permissive. It fails to conform to their beliefs. //

CF: Are you in favor of the 'let 50 flowers bloom' approach to welfare, wherein the federal government gives block grants to states and lets them craft welfare policy as they like?

LM: No. My fear is that the money will be handed out as it always has been and nothing will change.

CF: What of the more radical notion that the federal government should get out of welfare altogether and let states handle the problem?

LM: I question whether states can handle the problem. Some states like Wisconsin have great people crafting their policy and are getting good results. Most don't. So I think for the time being the federal government needs to retain a role in creating policy.

CF: To close, what do you see happening to government welfare policy in the near future?

LM: I think things will continue to change in the direction I advocated in *Beyond Entitlement*. No counter evidence has arisen which refutes mine and public opinion is behind it. However, the magnitude of the problem of poverty and reworking the giant government apparatus that deals with it will take time. Progress will be slow and uneven and starting these workfare programs is not easy. **C**

Notes

1 Myron Magnet, *The Dream & the Nightmare: The Sixties Legacy to the Underclass*. (New York, William Morrow & Co., Inc. 1993).

2 Marvin Olasky, *Renewing American Compassion*. (Chicago, Regnery, 1992).
Michael Tanner, *The End of Welfare*. (Washington, D.C., CATO Institute, 1996).

3 This argument was made most recently in William Julius Wilson's, *When Work Disappears*. (New York, Knopf, 1995).

Sokal's Swiftian Satire:

Scientific Language & Critical Discourse

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Of the many debates raging in today's academy, one in particular has received a great deal of attention from the "real world" with articles about it appearing in such mainstream publications as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Alan D. Sokal's satiric article, planned as an elaborate hoax *cum* scientific experiment, was published in the Spring 1996 edition of *Social Text*, a leading journal of cultural criticism, in the special "Science Wars" edition. The article was carefully designed to incorporate the most up-to-date critical terminology and fashionable ideas; in Sokal's words, he wanted to see if it would be published if it "sounded good" and "flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions." It was also utter gibberish. As Sokal pointed out in a confession published in *Lingua Franca* shortly after the *Social Text* article appeared, he was "troubled by an apparent decline in the standards of rigor in certain precincts of the academic humanities."² His article was conceived as a test of the academic rigor, and, one is tempted to say, he discovered *rigor mortis*. What makes this incident so noteworthy are Sokal's credentials: he is a physicist at NYU and has published articles on important advances in the new physics. His article, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," plays with a number of post-modern concepts such as the impossibility of objectivity, the hegemony of Western dogma, and the application of quantum field theory to social critical discourse.³ His argument proceeds haphazardly and by association, leaping from

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to quantum mechanics on the basis of some shared metaphors; his rhetoric is carefully constructed to elide key points which would render his article obviously false or to take as fact the wildest theories on which are built new and wilder theories. The crucial importance for scholars in the humanities is not so much that Sokal managed to fool a journal edited by respected critics like Fredric Jameson, but what the hoax reveals about our own culpability in fostering a milieu where language is antagonistic to meaning.

Sokal's position as a physicist at a prestigious university places him in an unusual position of being both within the academy and without the humanities. His political persuasion as a self-proclaimed Leftist ostensibly places him in the same camp as those he lampoons. In light of these facts, he can be viewed as a sort of post-modern Swift, using scathing satire for its original intention- creating change. Interestingly, both writers appeared in roughly analogous historical periods: Swift lived and wrote in the midst of the new Newtonian science's assault on the older worldview; Sokal writes as a member of the post-atomic new physics academy. Both are concerned with the direction learning is taking human endeavor. Although Swift's conservatism may contradict Sokal's leftist intentions, both are essentially arguing against the same thing: opacity or misuse of language. The experiments Gulliver encounters on Laputa are egregious. So too is Sokal's claim that physical "reality" is a "social and linguistic construct."⁴ Both satires can be distilled (to use a scientific term) to their basic critiques: the language of science and the language of literature are not the same.

The connections between Swift's language and plot devices in the *Travels* and the scientific advances of his time have been chronicled with sufficient clarity that we need not reiterate all of the points of similarity here.⁵ However, it will be useful to review some of

the points that are pertinent to the later argument. Foremost among these is the language borrowed from the scientific community which appears in the pseudo-scientific experiences Gulliver faces in his travels, and, more specifically, the apparent attitude Swift displays toward this scientific language. Because Gulliver, as a ship's surgeon, is ostensibly a rational man with some scientific learning, he should be remarkably well-equipped to furnish the type of observations demanded by the travelogue and by readers of such a genre, who are interested in factual, understandable data about unknown and unusual places. One of the major tensions in the *Travels* exerts its force through the expectations created by the scientifically-inclined travelogue and the literarily leaning satire. As Aldous Huxley (an author skilled in combining science and satire) points out, "[t]he purity of scientific language is not the same as the purity of literary language."⁶ Swift's work, then, is informed by the antinomies of the disparate linguistic tropes demanded by the different genres.

However, this tension between genres does not create unresolvable dilemmas in the text. It does create a textual milieu, though, where the simple, jargonized, carefully delineated language of science⁷ exists separately from its objective referents. In the phenomenological space of the text, the scientific language effectively claims a privileged position in the narrative's impetus, only to be undercut by the satirical impact of the meaning. In other words, the language of science establishes the certain tone of an objective report that is rendered impotent by the ridiculous nature of the things being reported.

Gulliver's description of one experiment in the Laputan academy is worth looking at closely to illustrate the comic and satiric effects of scientific language being undermined by the absurd. As he is touring the academy, Gulliver is seized by a small fit of cholick, so

his hosts take him to the room of a "great Physician" who has developed a new method of treatment that, in the final analysis, is no more appealing than it is effective. The doctor, Gulliver dispassionately tells us, takes a large pair of bellows with a "long slender Muzzle of Ivory" which is "conveyed eight Inches up the Anus," allowing the wind to be removed from the patient's bowels.⁸ The careful, point-by-point description of the mechanism and the procedure follows the Baconian lexicon and utilizes simple analogy in order to clarify things for the uninitiated. Moreover, we, after a perusal of the paragraph, would have little trouble following the procedure ourselves, were we so inclined. We know the procedure as well as the

average college freshman of today knows the procedures described in a chemistry lab book, and Gulliver's example does, in fact, read like a lab book, in some ways.

Although Swift's conservatism may contradict Sokal's leftist intentions, both are essentially arguing against the same thing: opacity or misuse of language.

The scientific rhetoric deflates near the end of the paragraph describing the procedure. For particularly difficult and stubborn cases, we are told, the doctor, rather than simply drawing off the illness-inducing wind, first fills the patient full by pumping air into the anus, causing the "adventitious Wind" to rush out, "bringing the noxious along with it (like Water put into a Pump)." A dog finds itself in the uncomfortable role of helping the scientist prove his theories with the bellows; the first, less intrusive procedure has no noticeable effect. In trying the second procedure, the doctor pumped until "the Animal was ready to burst, and made so violent a Discharge, as was very offensive to me and my Companions."⁹ The poor dog subsequently dies, giving human patients little confidence in the doctor's new cure. With the deflation and

death of the dog comes the deflation of the scientific rhetoric. Instead of the objective language of science, we have Gulliver's opinion both implicit and explicit. He states that the discharge was so offensive that he had to leave, implying that the scene was repulsive on more than one level. The last sight Gulliver sees of the doctor further emphasizes the absurdity and non-scientific impetus driving the satire- the doctor is attempting to revive a dead dog using the same method he used to kill it.

Swift's critique of the uses of language can also be seen in the textual manipulations and corrupt hermeneutics of Biblical exegesis in A Tale of a Tub. When the three brothers feel impelled to adorn their inherited coats with all manner of finery not allowed explicitly or even prohibited by their father's will, they indulge in a number of interpretive sleights that either manipulate the text beyond any recognizable meaning or ignore the text entirely. Although Swift carefully constructed this satire to reflect the Protestant-perceived follies of the Church of Rome, the absurd lengths the brothers go to in order to justify their extravagance may also be applied to much literary criticism.

The first reading of the will shows the brothers vainly attempting to find textual justification for wearing shoulder knots on their coats. After trying two methods unsuccessfully, they light upon the "totidem literis" as the method most likely to fulfill their needs. They eventually find all of the letters in "shoulder knots" except for the K, which prompts them to elaborate intellectual doublethink. They eventually arrive at the conclusion that K was not a legitimate letter in the old text, so a C, which the text apparently has in abundance, will suffice. Because they are able to manipulate the text to their advantage in this instance, they are encouraged to try again and again, each time their evaluative methods becoming more egregious. Later, when they need to justify gold lace, they rely on rumor and innuendo to prove their point; they "remembered" hearing

someone say that he heard their father's man say that he heard their father say that gold lace was not only acceptable but advisable.

Both of these methods illustrate the corruption of the original text by the interference of personal goals. In the former example, the critic, represented by the brothers, utterly destroys the context of the text, taking language apart, divorcing it from meaning, and reintegrating the language units into a more congenial (for the critic) form. The critic justifies this extreme textual violation by relying upon a rarefied and specialized jargon- Latin terms abound in the argument- and obscure intellectual assertions of dubious authenticity. In the latter example, the critic also relies on a legalistic-sounding Latin argument to make an extra-textual and highly suspect support for the claims. If we extend this analogy slightly further, the critic in the first instance looks at the linguistic structure of the text completely removed from any meaning the language itself expresses, while in the second, the critic goes so far afield from the text that the "evidence" loses all value. In both, tenuous, dubious theories are accepted as fact because the facts are convenient, and further meaning is built upon the rickety framework of these theories.

The Travels and A Tale of a Tub present critiques of scientific language and critical interpretive methods, respectively. However, the Bickerstaff papers have perhaps the most direct bearing on the current investigation because of the manner in which they illustrate Swift's criticism of pseudo-science, and, more significantly, the author's perpetration of an elaborate and cruelly funny hoax. John Partridge was an Almanac-maker with little education who published the astrological *Merlinus Liberatus* and many "violently Protestant" books and leaflets known more for their anti-High Church stance than for their literary value.¹⁰ When Swift returned to London in 1708, one of the most compelling pastimes for the *literati* was so-called

"Partridge shooting" or writing almanacs parodying Partridge's style; Swift, of course, had to join in, especially in his position as a defender of High Church values, and in his position as one who detested poorly written works.

He assumed the persona of Isaac Bickerstaff, a fictional rival to Partridge, who despises the shoddy predictions of the other astrologers and sets out to correct this problem with his own set of predictions. Bickerstaff chastises the other astrologers for their intentionally vague prognostications, claiming that most of the predictions seem to come true because the wording allows virtually any event to seem to fulfill the prediction. Swift's creation vows to fight this trend by presenting some very specific predictions, beginning with his prophecy of the death of John Partridge. Other more specific and outlandish predictions follow. When the day after that which was forecast for Partridge's death arrives, Swift had an Elegy prepared and printed proclaiming the accuracy of the prediction. Partridge quickly, and rather stupidly, insisted that he was actually alive, which only prompted Swift, through Bickerstaff, to claim that Partridge really was dead. The hoax went so far that the Stationer's Register removed Partridge's name from the rolls of publishers, and, when the undead man sued to regain his listing, lost his suit.¹¹

As a social history of the almanac printing wars, the Bickerstaff papers are fascinating; as parody they are hilarious; as satire they are penetrating and scathing; as farce they are the epitome of sublime absurdity. Because of this, it is worth looking at key sections of the papers in some detail to see Swift's rhetoric at work. The language Swift uses and the logical structure the papers follow are particularly relevant to this discussion.

The first paper, Predictions for the Year 1708, begins with a justification of Bickerstaff's project and stresses the author's apparent sincerity. He denounces the "gross impostors" who degrade the art of astrology with their false claims and sham prognostication, while offering his own authority to counter those who might be inclined to disbelieve in astrology because of the impostors. His defense of the "noble art" is impassioned and consists largely of exposing the "stock of nonsense, lies, folly, and impertinence" practiced by the impostors like Partridge, whose predictions "descend from no greater a height than their own brains."¹² The only positive defense he offers is to promise a future publication which will justify astrology from the point of view of "many learned men," including Socrates. But, like all good slippery arguments, this one is only intended—not actually written—and readers must take Bickerstaff's word. The remainder of the *apologia* consists of statements criticizing those who hold all astrologers in contempt because of the Partridges, or those who consult such unworthy prophets when they could have the real thing in Bickerstaff. In this way, Bickerstaff slyly undercuts the criticisms of astrology by shifting the terms of the argument: yes, he seems to be saying, there are false astrologers, but do not let these impostors besmirch the name of real scientists.¹³

The next element in the introduction of Bickerstaff's predictions is perhaps the most important in the terms of this investigation: he launches a two-pronged attack on the language of the rival almanacs. Bickerstaff admits his willingness to call these rivals astrologers or even conjurers if he is not able to point out "a hundred instances" of their poor control of language, and claims that they "do not so much as understand common grammar and syntax; they are not able to spell any word . . . [or] correct common sense or intelligible English."¹⁴ The grammatical problems are compounded by

the lazy vagueness of their predictions, which will "equally suit any age or country in the world." One must feel that Swift is at least as outraged by Partridge's bad writing as he is by Partridge's political leanings, or perhaps by the rich men who purchase and read such poorly written literature. Swift, then, announces early on that his satiric mission is not simply to undercut a radical Protestant, but that it serves a higher aesthetic purpose. Bickerstaff expresses his indignation at being grouped with untalented hacks and charlatans like Partridge, and Swift must feel similar indignation that the same readers of trite, ill-written prose also read his more carefully constructed and erudite works without making any distinction between the two.

Bickerstaff continues his careful exposition of the project by putting his own reputation as an astrologer on the line in order to credit the truth of his claims and the claims of his science. The irony here, of course, is that Bickerstaff does not exist and he has no reputation to put on the line. For Swift the benefits of this line of attack are multiple. First, he can make a claim that is unique among writers of almanacs: Bickerstaff is going to make specific predictions and stand answerable to these predictions. This makes Swift's satire more powerful by elevating the stakes of his persona, creating a sense of urgency and importance for readers who initially take Bickerstaff at face value and do not recognize the parody. Furthermore, by making a promise that the prognosticator will stand behind his words and answer them after the date of his predictions, Swift builds a willing audience for the later pamphlet, assuring interest in the sequel publications. By manipulating the reading audience in this way, Swift can exercise his satiric intentions more fully.

Bickerstaff's final qualification before announcing his predictions presents an intriguing epistemological argument. He brings up a possible objection to the claims of

“ The hoax went so far that the Stationer’s Register removed Partridge’s name from the rolls of publishers, and, when the undead man sued to regain his listing, lost his suit. ”

astrology; the influence of the stars may be real, but they cannot force men to commit actions, but can only incline them. Because of this, though the stars may indicate that something will happen, the astrologer cannot confidently assure that the events will happen as foretold. He answers this possible objection by conceding that men may evade their natural inclinations, but only if they have the wisdom of Socrates. Moreover, he goes on, most events in the world happen under the impetus of many men, and it is not logical to assume that all of the men involved will be able to resist the inclination of the stars. By again shifting the terms of the argument, Swift has taken a wise rhetorical position. His red herring has ignored other, possibly more important objections to astrology in favor of points that may be more easily proven. By shifting to an easier argument, Bickerstaff may then build upon one shaky area of agreement to advance more logically unsound points later. If we take his position now as truth, we are allowing him to proceed to greater assaults on our credulity.

Bickerstaff is now ready to make his predictions, and his first two fulfill all of his promises of specificity. The first is, as he puts it, “but a trifle” and claims that Partridge the Almanack-maker will die of a fever on the 29th of March at “about eleven at night.” He then quite compassionately advises poor Partridge to settle his affairs ahead of time. His next prediction is equally bold: Cardinal de Noailles, the Archbishop of Paris will die on the fourth of April.

Let us first consider the prediction of Partridge’s death. Bickerstaff condescendingly claims that this event is a trifle, in direct contradiction to what we know about Swift’s motives for writing the satire. He goes on to claim that he mentions such a

trivial concern to show how the ignorant sham astrologers fail to take care of their own concerns. Bickerstaff’s diction in this passage is notable for its scientific objectivity and absolute assurance. He has not made up this information, he tells us, but has consulted the “star of [Partridge’s] nativity” by a set of established rules which are, presumably, inviolate and immutable as the rules governing the motions of all heavenly bodies, a conscious echo of the new Newtonian science. Partridge’s death will “infallibly” occur at “about” eleven. Here Bickerstaff carefully chooses the language calculated to sound most appropriate. When a person dies, the day of death is “infallibly” remarked, but the exact hour is usually an approximation, since few think to look at a clock when a loved one draws his terminal breath. The mixture of specificity with a hint of vagueness illustrates the audacity of Bickerstaff’s predictions, which is reinforced when he goes so far as to attribute the cause of death to a raging fever.

The second prediction, though lacking in some of the specific details is even more audacious. By choosing a very important and well-known personage, Bickerstaff expansively illustrates his willingness to deal with issues too large for the lesser astrologers. Because the “victim” this time is French, Bickerstaff may cull additional benefits. This time the person dying is a papist and enemy of England who is going to die far from London, which will allow for some extra time before the prediction may be proven false as a result of the speed of message transmission and the confusion arising over the Old and New Style calendars, England at the time still being on the old Julian (not Gregorian) calendar.¹⁵ The wisdom of choosing such a target is revealed in one of the later Bickerstaff papers, A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff. He points out

that a Frenchman objected to his prophecy concerning the Cardinal's death by saying that the ecclesiast was still alive. Bickerstaff ponders how far a "Frenchman, a Papist, and an enemy" is to be trusted in an accusation against an "English Protestant" who is, furthermore, a loyal subject.¹⁶

Not all of Bickerstaff's predictions exert such gravity or specificity. His entry for May fifteenth claims that "news will arrive of a very surprising event, than which nothing could be more unexpected." The circular logic and utter ambiguity of this prediction render it absurd, and serves to highlight by contrast the earlier predictions. Likewise, when Bickerstaff predicts military or highly charged political events, he desists from giving too much information for fear of jeopardizing the concerns of the kingdom. His vagueness here underscores his patriotism, an important point in relation to the prediction of the Cardinal's death, as we have already seen. This prudence also exhibits Bickerstaff's wisdom, for, although he is willing to put his own reputation on the line to urge the veracity of astrology, he will not harm the kingdom simply to make a point. Thus, though some of his predictions suffer from the same vagueness he laments in other astrologers, Bickerstaff's lack of detail serves a higher purpose and advances his rhetorical strategy.

Three of his last predictions are noteworthy. In August, Bickerstaff sees a "particular incident"; a booth at Bartholomew Fair will fall, creating "much mischief."¹⁷ The utter triviality of this is juxtaposed very humorously with the almost offhand manner in which the death of the Pope is foretold. Surprisingly, little is made of this unusual prediction, either in papers at the time or in the critical literature that has grown up around Swift. Instead of dwelling on the ramifications of the Pope's death, aside from briefly mentioning a "mighty contest" of succession, Bickerstaff goes on to his final prediction. He puts this last message

in "mystical terms" and quotes Virgil in Latin, concluding that, on the 25th of the month, "the fulfilling of this prediction will be manifest to everybody."¹⁸ Swift here is alluding to the point he touched upon earlier that many unsophisticated are drawn to the shoddy writing of astrologers like Partridge. By cloaking his final prediction in Virgilian Latin, Bickerstaff is making a statement about those who buy and read his almanac; they must be intelligent enough to read Latin and then to interpret the "mystical" meaning of the poetry. In essence, Bickerstaff is saying, I will give you a clue; those worthy of reading my work will understand my point. Bickerstaff's implied audience is therefore more than merely the hordes on Grub Street, but encompasses higher classes as well.

John Partridge's response to Bickerstaff's prediction was, as we have already seen, indignant and more than a little foolish. He found himself arguing from the untenable position of attempting to prove that he was not dead.¹⁹ Bickerstaff responded to the absurdity of Partridge's response with an argument so filled with fallacies and dubious claims that few would not recognize it for what it was. The result of this was to make Partridge look even more foolish than he already looked. In this case, Swift's satire was marvelously successful; the foolishness of a bad writer was famously exposed. The fame, too, of the Bickerstaff papers spread, inspiring many Bickerstaff imitators, including Steele, who capitalized on the phenomenon by entitling a periodical *The Lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff*.

Alan Sokal's article in the Spring 1996 edition of *Social Text*, whether we call it a parody, hoax, or satire,²⁰ is important in the discussion of how language is used by scientists and by non-scientists, and, because of this, is closely related to Swift's works. Before delving into the essay itself, however, we should consider a brief but very revealing point that arose during the latest stages of the

controversy. In November, New York University sponsored a symposium where Alan Sokal and Andrew Ross, one of the Social Text editors, could discuss the hoax and subsequent issues, and determine "whether 'there are any intellectual standards in this corner of the left'."²¹ Sokal posed a question that revealed his concerns about the problems of Postmodernism in the natural sciences. An archaeologist asserted that there was no inherent contradiction between the traditional scientific view that Native Americans arrived on the continent by crossing the Bering Strait during the last ice age and the Native American traditional view that they sprang, completely formed, from the subterranean spirit world. Sokal countered this claim by saying that the two views were incompatible, and asked which was true.

An audience member at this point challenged Sokal by asking, "On whose authority should we be forced to answer your questions?" This confused Sokal, so Stanley Aronowitz, who found himself targeted in the notorious article, helped him out by adding, "It's a metatheoretical question. He's asking whether the framing itself is subject to interrogation." Sokal again stressed that the two theories were "mutually contradictory" and that he did not understand the line of questioning. Another in the audience asked whether Sokal's question should even be answered. Finally, Ross posed a question that implicitly underlined the political assumptions of the debate: "Why would you choose a question that would put on trial Native Americans? Why, then, in a polarizing way, are we asked to decide this question?"²² This exchange, to which we will shortly return, illustrates the nature of the debate between the social sciences (and humanities) and the natural sciences.

Sokal's article arose out of his fear that there has been "an apparent decline in the standards of rigor in certain precincts of the academic humanities."²³ Compounding this

fear is politics, specifically the politics of postmodern academia. Much of the most advanced postmodern theory comes from the academic Left, and Sokal, as an avowed Leftist who once taught physics in a Sandinistan college in Nicaragua, was disturbed that his political colleagues across campus were engaged in disturbingly lax academic exercises. Thus an article, and a seemingly unending controversy, was born. His "modest experiment", a term which has notable echoes of Swift, was planned to be utter nonsense, only well documented and cited nonsense in an attempt to shake up the academy.

The most often-quoted line from "Transgressing the Boundaries" comes in the second paragraph and serves more or less as the thesis, if such a piece can be said to have a thesis. Sokal states that

// [i]t has thus become increasingly apparent that physical 'reality' no less than social 'reality' is at bottom a social and linguistic construct; that scientific 'knowledge,' far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it; that the truth-claims of science are inherently theory-laden and self-referential; and consequently, that the discourse of the scientific community, for all its undeniable value, cannot assert a privileged epistemological status with respect to counterhegemonic narratives emerging from dissident or marginalized communities.²⁴ //

In his "confession," Sokal points out his use of "scare quotes" around "reality" to emphasize the radical proposition he is advancing: gravity is an arbitrary concept that has arisen from the "dogma" of Western intellectualism. Sokal suggests that anyone believing this proposition step out of his twenty-first floor window.

Sokal's thesis has more wide-ranging implications for the literary critic or language scholar than for the postmodern scientist intent on disproving gravity. He has, perhaps unintentionally, struck at the core of the currently raging debate, language. When he states that reality is a "social and linguistic" construct, he has stumbled upon something that troubles every scholar in the humanities who has ever asked if our pursuits are worthwhile. The humanities - and by this I also mean the "soft" sciences such as sociology and political science - deal with problems and issues that are not easily quantifiable or reducible. When literary scholars ask how best to approach a novel or poem written by a member of a 'dissident' or 'marginalized community' they may consider how dissidence or marginalization influenced the production of the text; in scientific terms, they are considering all of the variables in the experiment.

However, the problem intensifies because novels or poems are not chemical solutions in beakers, subject to certain "laws" of nature. Language is a social construct. Meaning, most linguists will tell us, is not inherent in the words themselves. Curiously, and coincidentally, the same debate over the nature of language occurred in Swift's time when the new science of Newton needed a lexicon and writing style that fitted the rational approach to nature. Writers of the time such as John Wilkins realized that language is "not part of nature" and that it cannot reveal anything about "the essences of things." Real knowledge, then, cannot come out of language, which caused a problem in "the epistemology of the new science."²⁵ Science attempted to create an artificial language for science that would "deal directly with things" without passing through the filter of inexact language.²⁶

An archaeologist asserted that there was no inherent contradiction between the traditional scientific view that Native Americans arrived on the continent by crossing the Bering Strait during the last ice age and the Native American traditional view that they sprang, completely formed, from the subterranean spirit world.

The humanity of language does not allow it to be linked directly with any sort of physical reality. Thus, scholars in the humanities, whose province is language, are at a disadvantage of sorts. Because of this disadvantage, and, more importantly, the realization of this disadvantage, scholars have been led to speculate on the nature and existence of an objective physical reality. While few scholars would take up Sokal's offer to step out of his twenty-first-floor window (though many of us might wish some to), many recognize the impossibility of an objective reporting that is not filtered through the human consciousness and, by extension, language.

These notions are fairly accepted in the academy and, by now, unexciting and far from revolutionary. The difficulty arises when academic discourse confronts other discourses, often resulting in yet another bruising assault on our profession.

The confrontation between academic discourse, particularly that of the left, and mainstream journalism illustrates the extent to which the academy has fallen in the eyes of those on the outside, even though postmodern thought is now a daily part of American culture.²⁷ When the Sokal controversy first came to light, the popular and mainstream media grabbed the story, and articles tossing about names such as Lacan and Derrida and terms such as hermeneutics and postmodern referentiality appeared on the breakfast tables of middle America. The tone of these articles is almost universally ironic and condescending. Most of them quoted Sokal's thesis paragraph, with its denial of reality, in sidebars with much supercilious tongue, clicking, as if to say, "Look at the gibberish those eggheads in the ivory tower think is important." The titles of some of the articles are also revealing: "When Wry Hits Your Pi From a Real Sneaky

Guy;²⁸ "Postmodern Gravity Deconstructed, Slyly;"²⁹ "A Painful Sting Within the Academic Hive."³⁰ Edward Rothstein, the author of the cleverly titled first article, takes Stanley Fish to task (somewhat out of context) for his analogy linking science and baseball, and further insists upon the importance of a physical reality. Roger Kimball's Wall Street Journal article ("A Painful Sting") delights in revealing the leftist orientation of *Social Text*, referring to Ross as a "trendy young Marxist", and seems somewhat surprised (and a bit disappointed) that Sokal, too, is a leftist. Kimball also calls Fish "infamous." The front-page New York Times article ("Postmodern Gravity") is the least overtly judgmental of the articles, though the ubiquitous sidebar quotation from Sokal's article is entitled "Coiled Gibberish in a Thicket of Prose."

We might be tempted to dismiss the implicit criticism lodged within these articles; laymen, after all, cannot be expected to deal with the complexity of postmodern critical thought when many of us are at times confused by the constantly evolving discourse. However, the last paragraph of the Wall Street Journal article reveals, in frighteningly specific and misguided language, why we should worry:

// Of course [literal meaning] does matter. And the controversy sparked by Alan Sokal's hoax may finally convince college deans and presidents, parents and alumni, legislators and trustees, to take a hard look at the politicized nonsense they have been conned into subsidizing. //

Presumably, Kimball wishes that "legislators and trustees" will make a political decision to rout the "politicized nonsense" from the university and "subsidize" more business courses and fewer humanities courses, thus ensuring a continued and expanding audience for the Journal. Kimball fails to recognize a number of important points. The subtext of his reactionary call is that college

youth are somehow being corrupted by this "nonsense," which is revealed by his inclusion of parents among those who must rise up to oust the dangerous leftists. The absurdity of this subtext is clear when we consider how little exposure most undergraduates have to the most complex postmodern discourse in their four-year tenure at a university. A sophomore may get a somewhat subversive reading of *The Scarlet Letter* in a survey literature course, but is not likely exposed to the more problematic issues. It is difficult enough to teach without trying to explain Derrida to a hung-over, bored nineteen-year-old. Furthermore, Kimball is implicitly questioning the value of an open forum in the university and endorsing homogeneity and complacency. The last word of the article is particularly chilling: "subsidized." In an age of shrinking university budgets, a call for further reductions on the basis of a dislike of the style of academic writing demonstrates the absurd level the debate has reached.

Before commenting further upon this notion, it would be useful to back up slightly and pose this question: if a postmodern sensibility is accepted in contemporary society, why has postmodern discourse in the humanities received so much negative attention? The answer to this conundrum is not simple and may pose more problems than it solves because we must turn to Sokal's article itself for part of the answer. In his discussion, Sokal relates a brief history of quantum mechanics and its basic unresolvability with general relativity, speculating that, if a synthesis between the two ideas is eventually possible, scientists cannot "predict with confidence what will be the language and ontology." He goes on to say that the "metaphors and imagery" of theoretical physics are useful in understanding quantum gravity.³¹ Just as Swift and the early Newtonian scientists struggled with a scientific language, so too do Sokal and other physicists. Abstract and mind-numbingly complex concepts must be described in a

language that is so limited by experience that the concepts may only be approached on the level of metaphor. The space-time "foam" described in quantum physics does not "really" resemble the foam that, say, one sprays out of a can for shaving any more than Schrödinger's cat was both alive and dead at the same time.³²

To approach this idea from a different angle, we must consider the metaphoric language of the humanities. I may, in presenting a reading of a poem, state that the imagery is heavy, using a metaphor for weight. However, my use of language is what may be termed metalinguistic or even metareferential. I am using inexact, metaphoric language to describe metaphoric language. A poem is already one step removed from the object or idea it is presenting. Its referent, and any commentary on it, is a further step removed. Scientific discourse differs from humanistic discourse chiefly in that there is generally a concrete, outside referent upon which the language is based. To use another example from the eighteenth century, let us consider this description of a still birth: "He found within her a hard mass of the form and size of a large Ninepin-bowl."³³ The analogous term here relates to a very "real" physical item that may be hefted, dissected, turned over. When humanist discourse goes a step further and enters the realm of critical theory, another distance between metaphoric language and referent arises, creating what Fredric Jameson termed metacommentary, and leading to more alienation of the uninitiated. Ironically, Sokal's ideas may become more important as advances in quantum physics lead to concepts that have consistently less relation to the experiential physical world; physics discourse may then be as metalinguistic as literary discourse.

We must consider yet another angle of approach before arriving at any possibility of answering the question I posed several pages

ago. As I mentioned at the beginning of the discussion about Sokal, the physicist asked a question at the NYU seminar that, frustratingly, was never answered. Sokal's frustration illustrates the type of gap that exists between the academic disciplines, further illustrating Huxley's point that literary and scientific language are very different. To the scientist, the two views of human origins are mutually contradictory, and only one may be termed accurate. To the humanist, the "truth" of a particular point may not have any relevance to the argument at all. The problem lies in the expectations of each side. A physicist may perform an experiment to prove gravity by dropping a small weight. If the experimenter drops the weight one thousand times, the weight will always fall. A humanist may not always arrive at the same conclusion when experimenting with a linguistically based concept.

To demonstrate this point, we may look at a passage in Swift mentioned earlier, the Laputan experiment to cure cholick with a bellows. I may decide that the most appropriate path to take in interpreting this passage is the Freudian. Swift's fascination with scatological themes and the human anatomy is elsewhere vividly apparent, so it would not be difficult to make a case for such a reading in this case. The detail with which he describes the mechanism of the bellows, such as the ivory muzzle, and its working method- being placed eight inches up the anus- reveals a Freudian anal-fixation. On the other hand, I may wish to take the same passage and look at it in a New Historicist light. Because there is ample evidence linking Swift's writing with the style found in the *Philosophical Transactions*, Swift's target of satire is the type of writing he found there and the conclusions the early scientists devised. His presentation of an absurd and potentially deadly "cure" in such a matter-of-fact tone serves as a critique of the unfounded certainties of the nascent science and

experimenters' unfounded hypotheses and subsequent ridiculous experiments.

Although these two readings are of the same passage, they are quite different, and each is equally "valid" in terms of literary criticism. Because of this, the question of the authoritative stance of the interpreter is not only relevant, but important. The assumptions an interpreter makes based on the critic's authority, political agenda, and personal biases influence the reading of a text and alter the transmitted meaning. In other words, the interpretation is open to interpretation. When the audience questioned Sokal's question about the origin of Native Americans on the basis of the authority of the questioner, they were attempting to define all of the parameters of the debate in terms of postmodern academic discourse in the humanities. This may be legitimate in the humanities, but we need not go far to understand the frustration felt by a scientist who was trained in observation of verifiable phenomena and the discrimination of valid hypotheses from invalid. In their response to Sokal, Andrew Ross and Bruce Robbins decry the "restricted trade routes" of academic issues and "sectarian Postmodernism" that keep the academic disciplines apart and incommunicative.³⁴ However, the controversy has pointed out that these "trade routes" are not entirely artificially enforced: the difference in the expectations and uses of language are not arbitrarily determined on the basis of turf wars. In yet another ironic passage in "Toward a Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," Sokal describes the resentment physicists feel when biologists encroach on their "turf."³⁵ Even in a parody intended to be ridiculous gibberish, there are instances of important insight.

How, then, does Sokal's article ultimately work, and what is the message we should take from the controversy? To answer this, I must first define the terms dropped several pages ago when referring to Sokal's article:

hoax, parody, and satire. Because Sokal was disturbed by the excesses he sees in the academic writing of much of the left, his motive, creating change, certainly fits the classic definition of satire, which was achieved through a parody of the academic style he questioned. In this sense, Sokal's article is similar to the Bickerstaff papers and Swift's brutal and subtle parody of almanac writing. Sokal's effort is ultimately less successful than Swift's because his language may be somewhat hyperbolic, and, more to the point, he committed a postmodern blunder by revealing his hand much too soon. His confession in *Lingua Franca* came immediately after the *Social Text* article came out, creating a series of eruptions and controversies that became increasingly self-referential. One cannot help wishing that he had waited to see if the controversy would have grown as quickly without his confession. Sokal here practiced bad scientific technique by ending the experiment and constructing a hypothesis before all of the information was collected.

The more important concept, though, is what this controversy says about the academy and, more specifically, writing and research in the academy. In his confession, Sokal points out that, as a physicist, he has no idea what to make of terms like *jouissance*.³⁶ This French deconstructivist term literally means enjoyment (though there seems to be little enjoyment in much literary criticism) because much of the theory involves wordplay, puns, and other linguistic games. Daniel Rothstein claims that the editors of *Social Text* may be suffering from "science envy," from the fact that science deals with invariant fact "unaltered by culture, politics, and prejudices." The "prestige and

Of course, by taking itself too seriously, the academy has set itself up for attacks such as Sokal's.

power" of science is threatening.³⁷ Perhaps because of this, the academy has pulled away from the notions of game playing and enjoyment in order to pursue more deadly serious concerns which might tend to legitimize the 'soft' disciplines. Of course, by taking itself too seriously, the academy has set itself up for attacks such as Sokal's. Ironically, science and math, as demonstrated by Wittgenstein, have many elements of game playing.³⁸

In the final analysis, Sokal's article may not be as "corrosive" as some fear.³⁹ If it helps open the discussion and allows the sciences and humanities to recognize the differences between their styles of discourse, it will have achieved an important goal. If, however, the eventual outcome is to alienate the humanities even more from mainstream culture, which is at least prepared to accept many postmodern ideas, then Sokal's article will indeed prove a very dangerous event. Satire, as Swift so astutely pointed out, "is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own."⁴⁰ The challenge for all writers in the academy is to peer closely at the mirror and determine if they are producing "coiled gibberish." Language is our province. We should not need a physicist to point out that our language needs work. However, we should be intelligent enough to realize that if a physicist points out our follies we should take steps to repair the damage. The choice is remarkable Swiftian: respond like Partridge and shrilly and vehemently deny the charges, or consider them judiciously and act accordingly.

C

Notes

1 "A Physicist Experiments With Cultural Studies," *Lingua Franca*, 6:4 (May/June 1996), p. 62.

2 *Ibid.*

3 "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text*, 46/47 (Spring/Summer 1996), pp. 216-252.

4 Sokal, *Social Text*, p. 217.

5 Frederik Smith notes that the influence of the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* on the *Travels* has been known for fifty years, beginning with arguments by Nicholson and Mohler. The Laputan experiments in Book III have been carefully traced and represent "skewerings of actual investigations." See "Scientific Discourse: Gulliver's *Travels* and The *Philosophical Transactions*," *The Genres of Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Frederick N. Smith (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1990), p. 139. Smith also points out in his article other similarities in genre, language, and the problem of objectivity.

6 Quoted in Smith, p. 143.

7 Smith charts the types of words and phrases that frequently occur in the *Transaction's* reports. The vocabulary stresses observation and objectivity as well as the Baconian notion that science is not made of rhetoric but "cautious, naturalized observation of phenomena." He goes on to point out some passages in Swift that illustrate the significant usage of a Baconian lexicon (pp. 145, 146, 148ff.).

8 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Paul Turner (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), p. 180.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

10 Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works, and the Age*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 198-99.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 200-208.

12 Jonathan Swift, *A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, eds. Angus Ross & David Woolley, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 193.

13 In an odd way, this apologia follows the scientific writings in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. Many of the essays therein began with assertions of the authors' intentions and ability to conduct and transmit objective accounts. Many also insist upon their desire to stick to facts and express their implicit willingness to allow the readers or others to offer a hypothesis. Bickerstaff, too, seems to be willing to let his readers choose whether or not to believe, which explains his deferment of "proof" to another publication. For more on the *Philosophical Transactions* and the apologia found in the essays, see Smith, pp. 145 ff.

14 Swift, *A Critical Edition*, p. 194.

15 Ehrenpreis, 204.

16 Swift, *A Critical Edition*, pp. 213-214, Swift's emphasis.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

19 Swift or one of his friends wrote *An Account of the Proceedings of Isaac Bickerstaff*, a purported response by Partridge to Bickerstaff's prediction of his death. The humor of the piece reaches its height when the hapless Partridge is accosted by various people, including the church sexton, who chastise him for not paying for his funeral. I hesitate to put a name on this account because of some confusion in sources. Ehrenpreis claims that Congreve had a hand in writing *Squire Bickerstaff Detected*, which agrees with another source (Ehrenpreis, pp. 206-207).

20 For the moment I will forego indulging in an epistemological differentiation when considering exactly what Sokal's essay is. However, given the controversy the work has caused, it will be essential to address this issue later.

21 Malcolm Gladwell, "A Matter of Gravity," in *The New Yorker* (November 11, 1996), p. 36.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

23 Sokal, *Lingua Franca*, p. 62.

24 Sokal, *Social Text*, pp. 217-18.

25 Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press), p. 251.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

27 Postmodern irony, self-referentiality, and shifting of conventional modes of objectivity are indeed a part of popular mainstream culture. One example from television will suffice to establish this point. A few years ago, the popular show "Seinfeld" followed a storyline in which Jerry, the main character, was involved in writing a pilot for an NBC sitcom very similar to the real one. Many episodes dealt with the problems of casting actors to play Jerry's friends, writing a salable script, and other hazards of creating a television show. The actual show became extremely self-referential and evolved into a complex metafictional comment of the nature of fame, popular culture, and Americans' fascination with the inner workings of the media. Episodes dealt with the confusion of identity and the difficulty of separating the fiction of the show from its "reality." This is only one example of the increasingly postmodern stance of popular culture.

28 Edward Rothstein, "When Wry Hits Your Pi From a Real Sneaky Guy" in *New York Times* (May 26, 1996), A6.

29 Janny Scott, "Postmodern Gravity Deconstructed, Slyly" in *New York Times* (May 18, 1996), A1.

30 Roger Kimball, "A Painful Sting Within the Academic Hive" in *Wall Street Journal* (May 29, 1996), A18.

31 Sokal, *Social Text*, p. 222.

32 For more on Schrödinger's notorious speculation on the nature of the wave-particle duality, see John Gribbin's *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat: Quantum Physics and Reality* (New York, Bantam, 1984).

33 Smith, p. 147.

34 Bruce Robbins and Andrew Ross, "Mystery Science Theater" in *Lingua Franca* 6:5 (July/August, 1996), p. 56.

35 Sokal, *Social Text*, p. 223.

36 Sokal, *Lingua Franca*, p. 62.

37 Rothstein, p. 6.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Stanley Fish, "Professor Sokal's Bad Joke" in *New York Times* (May 21, 1996); A23.

40 "The Battle of the Books" in *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings* (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 368.

The (In)compatibility of Rousseau and Olson

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Introduction

This essay is motivated by a single question- is the collective action problem, as it is understood by modern theorists of political economy, conceptually incompatible with Rousseau's understanding of collective action? To effectively answer this question, I shall present a series of hypotheses, or potential answers, that will serve as intellectual guides throughout the analysis. The hypotheses are "no," "yes," and "maybe." Next, I will briefly explain the conceptions of collective action offered by Rousseau in, *Of The Social Contract*, and by modern theorists of political economy, with major emphasis on *The Logic of Collective Action* by Mancur Olson.¹ As will be seen, the Rousseauian and Olsonian conceptions of collective action overlap and diverge enough to provide some support for all three hypotheses, depending on the particular points the analyst chooses to emphasize and/or exclude. Therefore, hypothesis 3, "maybe," although the most intellectually unsatisfying, provides the most complete answer to our initial question, for it includes the complements and contradictions of both perspectives.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Rousseau's conception of collective action and the contemporary notion according to Olson are fundamentally inconsistent. Thus, an attempt to find commonalities among these two perspectives should fail miserably. For example, this hypothesis highlights the distinction between the infallibility of the general will² and the political economists' theorems that claim that "collective or joint outcomes of rational choices can fail measures of rationality employed by individuals. Prisoners' Dilemma, Arrow's theorem, and a failure of efficacy in large groups all represent this anomaly: individuals are rational, society is not."³ Clearly, Rousseau's claim that "the general will is always upright and always tends toward the public utility"⁴ is

in direct contradiction with the aforementioned idea that a society of rational individuals does not equate with collective rationality for social decisions.

Hypothesis 2: Rousseau's conception of collective action and the Olsonian notion of collective action are readily compatible. Accordingly, these two understandings can be united into one theory of collective action while being faithful to the philosophical foundations of both perspectives. For example, as Levine notes, "For Hobbes and Rousseau and for the majority of theorists after them, political philosophy is about forms of association entered into by atomic individuals."⁵ Thus, both Rousseau and modern theorists maintain that the decision by individuals to act together is an essential part of understanding collective action.

Hypothesis 3: Rousseau's conception of collective action and the Olsonian notion of collective action conceptually overlap and diverge, so that they are both inaccurately described as incompatible and incapable of being cleanly united into one theory. Therefore, the proper answer to the original question is "maybe." For example, Jasey states that "voluntary contribution to shared benefits can be fully consistent with the successful pursuit of narrow self-interest."⁶ This claim by a contemporary theorist seemingly provides a way to unite the two perspectives. However, the axiom of "narrow self-interest," as will be shown, is not an appropriate interpretation of the Rousseauian motivation for behavior in collective action situations. Clearly, such a union of ideas is not truly faithful to Rousseau, although the commonalities between the sides are readily apparent.

Rousseau's Conception of Collective Action

Rousseau's conception of collective action emerges from the "fundamental" problem solved by the social contract: "To find a form of association which defends and protects with the whole force of the community the person and goods of every associate, and by means of which each, uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself, and remains as free as before."⁷ Or, as summarized by Levine: "Rousseau's idea, very generally, is that in some contexts individuals can and should coordinate their activities by seeking to advance their interests as integral members of the collective entities they freely constitute."⁸ From this, two questions emerge. First, how are their interests to be coordinated? Second, specifically, what are "their interests?"

The answers to the two questions stem from the formation of the social contract itself. For the first question, their interests will be coordinated through the "total alienation of each associate, with all of his rights, to the whole community: for in the first place, as each gives himself up entirely, the condition is equal for all, no one has any interest in making it burdensome to others."⁹ In this sense, once each individual has chosen to "alienate" himself to the community, coordination of each individual becomes an easier task because he is not a mere individual any longer, but a self-selected "member" of the community. This concept can effectively be understood in the following manner: "Each person, in joining civil society, seeks his self-preservation. But in pursuing this end through community, he must merge his very personality with those of others."¹⁰ And, once an individual is understood as a member of the society, whose personality has been merged or united with the other members, the logic behind the ultimate coordination mechanism becomes comprehensible, "that whoever refuses to

behavior. It does not follow, because all of the individuals in a group would gain if they achieved their group objective, that they would act to achieve that objective, even if they were all rational and self-interested. Indeed, unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests.¹⁹

This claim can best be understood through Olson's analogy to the state and taxation. Olson notes that the state provides certain public goods that are universally beneficial, *i.e.*, national defense and police protection. However, the necessary taxation to support the provision of these services would never be adequately funded if taxation was purely voluntary, despite the bonds of patriotism, ideology, and culture.²⁰ The benefits of the state-provided public goods would be enjoyed by the individual citizen whether he/she contributed or not. Therefore, taxation is compulsory upon all individuals, and not voluntary. Olson maintains that this disincentive to participate exists in all large groups. Consequently,

The individual member of the typical large organization is in a position analogous to that of the firm in a perfectly competitive market, or the taxpayer in the state: his own efforts will not have a noticeable effect on the situation of his organization, and he can enjoy any improvements brought about by others whether or not he has worked in support of his organization.²¹

This is the conceptual context in which Olson's earlier assertion that rational, self-interested individuals will not work to achieve the common or group interest should be understood. Now, the difficulties that modern theorists associate with collective action becomes clear. "Although groups are intended to pursue the collective well-being,

the pursuit of private gains by constituent agents may lead to outcomes that spell disaster for collective benefits."²²

However, as can be seen in the citation above, Olson makes two caveats about when collective action will likely occur. He maintains that small groups are more likely to engage in collective action and, in the case of large groups, further coercion or special devices are necessary for collective action. These caveats will be explained in turn. First, Olson notes the difference between small and large groups. In small groups, social pressure can effectively operate to promote collective action. However, this does not nullify his assumption of self-interest, "for social status and social acceptance are *individual, noncollective* goods (author's italics)."²³ This is because "it is in the nature of social incentives that they can distinguish among individuals: the recalcitrant individual can be ostracized, and the cooperative individual can be invited into the center of the charmed circle."²⁴ Clearly, some sort of face-to-face or interpersonal contact is needed for this to be effective, and this is the advantage of small groups in obtaining collective action.

Secondly, the "coercion" or "special device" that Olson makes reference to are selective incentives, that act on individuals "not indiscriminately, like the collective good, upon the group as a whole, but rather selectively toward the individuals in the group."²⁵ Further, the "selective" nature signifies that the incentives only apply to members of the group or community, so that individuals outside of the group are treated distinctly. Lastly, the selective incentives "can be either negative or positive, in that they can either coerce by punishing those who fail to bear an allocated share of the costs of the group action, or they can be positive inducements offered to those who act in the group interest."²⁶ For instance, unions that offer insurance benefits for its membership are engaging in a positive form of a selective incentive, while compulsory

membership would be a negative inducement.

Applying the Analysis to the Hypotheses

The analysis provides solid evidence for viewing the two perspectives as fundamentally incompatible. Clearly, the actors engaged in collective action in Rousseau's conception are not operating according to the postulate of rational self-interest. In fact, this motivational force is discarded once the actors agree to work together and "alienate" themselves to the whole community. "To hold that there can be 'moral and collective bodies' within which individuals are internally related is to maintain that collectivities can have interests irreducible to the interests of their constituent parts conceived atomistically."²⁷ This atomistic or individual conception of interests is precisely how modern theorists of political economy conceive of the actor's interests. In fact, in

Simply, the "atomistic metaphor," which underlies Olson's entire theory, is inappropriate for Rousseau's conception of citizens engaged in collective action.

modern political economy, the ability to speak of a general interest is ruled out by the assumption of methodological individualism. As Ordeshook states, "only people choose, prefer, share goals, learn, and so on, and that all explanations and descriptions of group action, if they are theoretically sound, ultimately must be understandable in terms of individual choice."²⁸ This fundamental dichotomy between Rousseau's and Olson's conception is effectively summarized by Frohock,

The general will requires a distinction between public and private selves. Individuals expressing preferences in terms of

self-interest cannot produce a collective outcome that can legitimately regulate individual action. If, however, individuals identify themselves as members of the political society, then they will express the common interest or general good in their preferences.²⁹

Thus, Rousseau's notion of the transformation of the individual's will and/or personality into a social will is completely opposed to the assumption of rational maximization of personal welfare. Essentially, no individual in Olson's perspective underwent a transformation of personality and/or will upon entering the society or group. The rational individual remains self-interested, and does not obtain unity of "mind, feeling, and loyalty" to guide his decision-making process. Simply, the "atomistic metaphor," which underlies

Olson's entire theory, is inappropriate for Rousseau's conception of citizens engaged in collective action.³⁰

However, though seemingly incompatible from their fundamental assumptions, both Rousseau and Olson admit the need for some form of coercion in order to obtain collective action. For Rousseau, coercion to conform to the general will is justifiable, since "resistance to the general will would be tantamount to resisting one's own will, properly understood."³¹ Therefore, coercion is a necessary condition for collective action that provides a normative good. For Olson, coercion in the form of either a positive or negative inducement that operates only upon members of the group/society is also a necessary condition for collective action, since a rational individual would not engage in the collective action of a large group without the inducement. Undoubtedly, Olson's understanding of selective incentives are not to be viewed as "forcing one to be free," but the incentives do serve the same purpose as the coercion that Rousseau is willing to admit, the furthering of collective action. Also,

Rousseau's claim that "The engagements which bind us to the social body are obligatory only because they are mutual" does emphasize the importance of selectivity of application to community/group members in a very similar manner to Olson.

Additionally, social pressure plays a role in both perspectives, albeit Olson de-emphasizes it to apply only to small groups. Frohock asserts, "Put simply, individuals who see each other frequently and continuously will typically establish commitments that noncoercively assure reciprocity."³² This claim could be applied with equal effectiveness to both perspectives. For Rousseau, the general will is clearly shaped and reinforced by the constant interaction of the citizens. In fact, this directly relates to his desire for a small state, in which this interaction is still feasible (which is very similar to Olson's claim that social pressure only applies to small groups).³³ Also, reciprocity, or thinking in terms of relation to your peers, is precisely what causes the general will to be upright.³⁴ As citizens, it is the only acceptable form of decision-making. For Olson, Frohock's statement is exactly the non-coercive force of interpersonal contact that occurs with small groups to which he was referring. However, it should be remembered that social pressure is related to the transformation of the will of the member in Rousseau's conception, while it is secondary to the basic assumption of self-interest for Olson. Therefore, it is properly understood as another commonality that emerges from divergent foundations.

Conclusion

As can now be seen, Rousseau's and Olson's understanding of collective action are based on fundamentally distinct assumptions, but share crucial features or components. Accordingly, the evidence provides the greatest support for hypothesis 3: Rousseau's conception of collective action and the Olsonian notion of collective action

conceptually overlap and diverge, but cannot be cleanly united into one theory.

Clearly, it is conceptually inaccurate to understand the citizens in Rousseau's society as rational maximizers of personal welfare. As has been documented, the transformation of will that distinguishes and "ennobles" the citizens causes them to think in terms consistent with the general interest, which has become their individual interest. Olson's self-interested actor who recognizes that he can choose not to participate and still receive the flow of group benefits is simply a different conceptual entity from Rousseau's citizen.

Yet, the commonalities undeniably exist. Both theories admit the need for coercion or inducements that discriminates between group members and non-members to enhance the potential for collective action. And, both theories recognize the power of social pressure as a tool to obtain group cohesion in the furtherance of collective action.

Accordingly, the answer to the incompatibility question is, as mentioned before, "maybe." Fundamental overlap and divergence is the most accurate description of a comparison of these two theories. Is this answer intellectually unsatisfying? Perhaps. Is this answer intellectually honest? Yes. **C**

Notes

- 1 Olson's work is the logical basis for comparison, since it is considered the seminal work in the field.
- 2 Jean-Jacques, Rousseau, *Of The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*, Principles of Political Right, Translation, Introduction, and annotations by Charles M. Sherover, (New York, Harper & Row, Inc., 1984), p. 26.
- 3 Fred M. Frohock, *Rational Association* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1987), p. 3.
- 4 Rousseau, *Of The Social Contract*, p.26.
- 5 Andrew, Levine, *The General Will, Rousseau, Marx, Communism*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 26.
- 6 Anthony, de Jasay, *Social Contract, Free Ride, A Study of the Public Goods Problem*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989), p. 4.
- 7 Rousseau, *Of The Social Contract*, p.14
- 8 Levine, *The General Will, Rousseau, Marx, Communism*, p.2.
- 9 Rousseau, *Of The Social Contract*, p.14.
- 10 William T. Bluhm, *Force or Freedom? The Paradox of Modern Political Thought*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984), p. 99.
- 11 Rousseau, *Of The Social Contract*, p.17-18.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 13 Bluhm, *Force or Freedom?*, p. 87.
- 14 Levine, p.30.
- 15 N.J.H., Dent, *Rousseau: An Introduction to his Psychological, Social, and Political Theory* (New York, Basil Blackwell, 1988) p.186.
- 16 Todd, Sandler, *Collective Action, Theory and Applications*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 19.
- 17 Peter C., Ordeshook, *Game Theory and Political Theory. An Introduction*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1986), p.1.
- 18 Mancur, Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and The Theory of Groups*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1965), p.14.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p.1-2.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 22 Sadler, *Collective Action, Theory and Applications*, p. 193.
- 23 Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, p. 61.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p.61.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 51
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Levine, p. 34.
- 28 Ordeshook, *Game Theory and Political Theory. An Introduction*, p. 1
- 29 Frohock, *Rational Association*, p, 98.
- 30 Levine, Andrew, p. 155
- 31 Jasay, *Social Contract, Free Ride. A Study of the Public Goods Problem*, p.73.
- 32 Frohock, p. 92.
- 33 This is most clearly manifest when Rousseau praises the island of Corsica as the "one country capable of legislation" p.48. *Of The Social Contract*.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Kant's 1st Antinomy

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Introduction

In his landmark *Critique of Pure Reason*,¹ Kant offers two distinct arguments for his doctrine of Transcendental Idealism (TI); *i.e.*, the doctrine that objects conform to our knowledge of them, as a function of the constituting operations of the human knower.² The first is given in the first major section of the *Critique*, the Transcendental Aesthetic, and the second in the Transcendental Dialectic. In the Aesthetic, Kant gives his positive case for the doctrine, but it is unclear that the argument there provides an apodictically certain case against Transcendental Realism (TR) the doctrine that objects are what they are independently of the activity of the human mind.³ The argument there seems to go like this:

- (1) We have no knowledge of things apart from what is presented to us by our human cognitive faculties.
- (2) Therefore, we have no knowledge of things in themselves, as they might be apart from the constituting effect of our faculties.

This sort of argument is still popular today,⁴ and while it has some plausibility, it is not a refutation of TRC that (2) does not follow from (1). In fact, (2) is ambiguous. If one takes things in themselves as a rigid designator to refer to the (putative) mind-independent entities in question, the transcendental realist will reject the inference. Why couldn't it be that our faculties are what enable us to get at things in themselves? If, however, what is meant is the thing in itself apart from how we are capable of cognizing it, transcendental realists of some stripes could accept that without endorsing TI.⁵

The key issue, then at least within contemporary treatments of the debate under the realism/anti-realism rubric concerns the question of whether our faculties obscure or illumine things as they are in themselves to human awareness. To address this debate is beyond the scope of this paper,⁶ but it is at least reasonable to see Kant's case for TI as more or less likely rather than a sure disproof of TR.

When we turn to the Transcendental Dialectic, however, the situation is different. Given the further premise that TR and TI are mutually exclusive and exhaustive options (since TR, the doctrine that objects are what they are apart from the activity of knowers minds,⁷ just is the denial of TI), a disproof of TR would be a proof of TI.⁸ And this is precisely Kant's goal here; in fact, it is to show the necessary falsehood of TR by elucidating its built-in self-contradictory assumptions. In the Aesthetic and Analytic, Kant argues that space, time, and the Categories supplied by the Understanding are features of the mind which, when applied to our intuitions (the raw material supplied by the Sensibility) provide us with *bona fide* knowledge. But while these *a priori* structures of the human knower apply to all appearances, our faculty of Reason is led by its own nature to try and apply these features to things in themselves, apart from appearances. Kant thinks this is a natural disposition (cf. B670), and that it can serve a valuable regulative function (cf. B692). But Reason cannot provide us with knowledge, as the attempt to apply these features beyond the realm of appearances is always erroneous – what Kant calls transcendental illusion.

Kant attempts to show how such illusion results in a variety of ways, as in each case Reason seeks the ultimate explanations of the conditions of possible experience. Reason's errors occur in a way corresponding to the three different sorts of judgments (A304/B361). From the categorical

judgment Reason seeks the absolute subject (the soul), from the hypothetical judgment the absolute unity of conditions of our experience (the world as totality), and from the disjunctive judgment it seeks the absolute unity of the conditions of all we can think (God as subject of all perfections). These three ideas of Reason correspond to the three speculative disciplines of rational psychology, cosmology, and theology.

In this paper I will investigate one of Kant's arguments pertaining to the speculative discipline of cosmology, from the section he entitles the Antinomy of Pure Reason. Kant there offers four pairs of arguments designed to show that Reason's attempt to discover the unconditioned condition of the unity of conditions of our experience will lead, through sound argumentation, to contradictory conclusions. Specifically, Reason can prove that the world both does and does not have a beginning in time (A426=B454-A433=B461),⁹ that the ultimate constituents of objects are and are not simple (A434=B462-A443=B471), that there is and is not unconditioned freedom (A444=B472-A451=B479), and that there is and is not a necessary cause of the world (A452=B480-A461=B489). The culprit in each case is an assumption (different in each case) built into the thesis and antithesis alike, an assumption essential to TR but rejected by TI, which generates the contradictory conclusion. Thus if TR essentially contains a contradictory thesis, it must be false; and since TR and TI are mutually exclusive and exhaustive options, the antinomies prove, if successful, the necessary truth of TI.

An adequate response to Kant with the intent of defending TR must take his arguments in the Antinomy of Pure Reason section quite seriously. Indeed, Kant himself took them quite seriously, writing to Christian Garve that it was the discovery of the antinomies that first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason with itself.¹⁰

Accordingly, I intend to do just that, and take a first step towards defending TR by trying to show that Kant's first antinomy need not result in a contradictory conclusion. In particular, I hope to argue a number of points. First, *contra* a host of critics, I aim to show that Kant's argument for the thesis that the world had a beginning in time is a good one. Next, I will argue that his antithesis argument, while largely cogent, is ultimately unsuccessful, thanks to resources provided by a refutation of the third antinomy's antithesis. By defending the notion of agent causation against the latter antithesis, a satisfying escape to the former becomes possible as well, allowing the transcendental realist to kill two birds with one stone.

While I focus on the ontological questions raised by the antinomies, I also suggest an epistemological option to Kant which modifies his view, but which would survive the failure of the antinomies while maintaining a position in some ways still in the spirit of T1. Instead of arguing that we can't know what we can't experience, I will suggest as a better option that we can't know what isn't evidentially based on experience. While such an epistemology seems to me preferable, and while I think I show Kant's first and third antinomies unsuccessful, it is important to acknowledge up front that this paper cannot be taken as anything resembling a proof of TR. If successful, however, it is an important first small step of a larger research program. It is now time to see if it is successful.

First Antinomy: Thesis

Kant's statement of the thesis that the world has a beginning in time is as follows:

If we assume that the world has no beginning in time, then up to every given moment an eternity has elapsed and there has passed away in the world an infinite series of successive states of things. Now the infinity of

a series consists in the fact that it can never be completed through successive synthesis. It thus follows that it is impossible for an infinite world-series to have passed away, and that a beginning of the world is therefore a necessary condition of the world's existence. (A426=B454)

Kant there offers four pairs of arguments designed to show that Reason's attempt to discover the unconditioned condition of the unity of conditions of our experience will lead, through sound argumentation, to contradictory conclusions.

A number of comments are in order before taking a closer look at the argument *per se*. First, it is crucial to recognize that he is not arguing for a beginning of time, but a beginning of the world in time. Second, by world I take Kant to refer to every thing (or to the sum of events) the transcendental realist thinks is in space and time.¹¹ And third, it is essential in what follows to distinguish between an actual infinite and a potential infinite. An actual infinite is a completed totality that cannot be added to, whose members can be placed into a one-to-one correspondence with the set of all natural numbers. A potential infinite, by contrast, is a collection which is always finite but can be added to indefinitely.

An illustration may be helpful here. If God exists and has foreknowledge, then such a being will mentally grasp the whole series of future events at once. What is grasped is an actually infinite collection, assuming of course that the series of future events is an unending one. For us, however, even if God grants us immortality, our slog through the never-ending future generates a series that is only potentially infinite. There will never be a point at which we will have lived for an actually infinite amount of time, though the finite span of our existence will continue unendingly,

forming an ever-larger collection, but not an actually infinite one.

Various Criticisms:

This sort of argument has long been popular, and as with virtually any argument of philosophical interest, long attacked. Representative of the critiques offered are the following: Russell's attack on Kant's definition of infinity, and a more common charge that the argument illicitly assumes a starting point.

1. Russell on the definition of infinity

Russell charges Kant with a mistake about the definition of infinity. Thus:

// The notion of infinity . . . is primarily a property of classes, and only derivatively applicable to series; classes which are infinite are given all at once by the defining property of their members, so that there is no question of completion or successive synthesis. And the word synthesis, by suggesting the mental activity of synthesizing, introduces, more or less surreptitiously, that reference to mind by which all Kant's philosophy was infected.¹² //

In his observations on the thesis of the first Antinomy, Kant, as Russell suggests, defines the true transcendental concept of infinity as a successive synthesis of units for the enumeration of a quantum series that cannot be completed (A432=B460). Russell claims that an (actual) infinity is given all at once, and apparently thinks Kant is so carried away with his empiricism that everything must be reduced to a mental operation. But since the attempt to count to infinity will never generate a completed series, but only an ever-increasing potential infinite, Kant's definition begs the question against actual infinities.

If Kant really did argue in this way, he would be guilty of the sort of psychologism of which

Russell accuses him. But he does not. The problem is not with an infinite class, which may be given all at once, but with an infinite series, which *qua* series must be given successively. The events of past time occur serially, so a collection consisting of all past events must be given in reality by successive synthesis. God as portrayed by timelessness advocates such as Augustine and Boethius may be able to grasp such a collection of events *tota simul*, but the collection is not formed in that way. In fact, if Russell's claims about infinities being given all at once is a statement of necessity, then it seems Russell must grant Kant's point about the beginning of the world in time, given the successive nature of temporal events!¹³ However, Russell offers a second criticism which allows for the notion of a series' being formed by successive synthesis.

2. 'But it's always infinite!'

Russell proceeds:

In the second place, when Kant says that infinite series can never be completed by successive synthesis, all that he has even conceivably a right to say is that it cannot be completed in a finite time. Thus what he really proves is, at most, that if the world had no beginning, it must have already existed for an infinite time. This, however, is a very poor conclusion, by no means suitable for his purposes.¹⁴

Russell is not alone in offering this sort of criticism. Take Jonathan Bennett, for example:

Kant's argument exploits a pun. Because the discrete series P [the series of non-overlapping events earlier than the present instant] is infinite, it cannot be completed in the sense of having two termini; from which Kant infers that it cannot be completed in the sense of terminating or having a terminus at its temporally later end.¹⁵

while the present moment constitutes an endpoint to the other series. Therefore, while it is agreed that Hercules' labor is an impossible one, that this shows anything about the series of past moments culminating in the present is not so obvious.

So another, more fruitful approach is to imagine someone who claims to have existed throughout an infinite series of past events, perhaps spending her time counting down from negative infinity. If we are to suppose this possible, as we must on the Russell-Bennett-Moore thesis, then there isn't any good reason why a new counter couldn't complete the same series of counts in the opposite direction, from zero through negative infinity. (One might also ask, troublesomely, at what point the two might cross.) The sets formed by each series have the same (number of) members, and so the direction of the synthesis is irrelevant. But since the synthesis beginning with the present and working backwards is logically impossible as Russell, Bennett, and Moore recognize¹⁹ so too is the synthesis of an equivalent series proceeding in the opposite direction. But as this is precisely the sort of series that an actually infinite number of past events would constitute, the proper conclusion here is that Kant is successful: the thesis argument does demonstrate a beginning of the world in time.

First Antinomy: Antithesis

Recall that Kant's project here is to show T1 true by proving TR (necessarily) false, and he will do that by showing that TR implies, necessarily, that both certain propositions and their contraries are true. This contradictory result leads him to find an offending self-contradictory premise built into TR itself; reject it and one escapes incoherence by embracing T1. The transcendental realist assumption he wants to reject here is that time is (or can be) a feature of events in themselves rather than (only) a necessary condition of human experiencing supplied by us as

knowers, and to show this assumption incoherent he will try to demonstrate that it can be used in otherwise sound arguments to prove contradictory conclusions. Having argued successfully for the thesis, Kant now argues for the antithesis as follows:

For let us assume that it [the world] has a beginning. Since the beginning is an existence which is preceded by a time in which the thing is not, there must have been a preceding time in which the world was not, i.e. an empty time. Now no coming-to-be of a thing is possible in an empty time, because no part of such a time possesses, as compared with any other, a distinguishing condition of existence rather than of non-existence; and this applies whether the thing is supposed to arise of itself or through some other cause. In the world many series of things can, indeed, begin; but the world itself cannot have a beginning, and is therefore infinite in respect of past time. (A427=B455)

Kant is not arguing that there is something incoherent about empty time; rather, his complaint seems to be that there can be no sufficient reason for a thing's being caused to come into being.²⁰ Given two moments of empty time t1 and t2, if the necessary and sufficient conditions for the efficient cause of X's coming to be are present at t2, causing it to come into existence, then according to Kant there is no reason why X would not have come into being at t1. The two times are qualitatively indistinguishable. But since such a condition renders the causality necessary to create the world in time an impossibility with respect to one moment over another, it turns out that the universe must simply have always existed. Thus both the thesis and antithesis have been proved, says Kant, and the conclusion is that the arguments for each share an incoherent premise; to wit, that we can speak of the world as a totality existing in itself.²¹ If this is correct, TR is in trouble, so let us examine this argument more carefully.

And there's Moore:

It is, therefore, a pure fallacy to suppose that there cannot have been an infinite series of past hours, simply because that series has an end in one direction and has come to an end now; all that we mean by calling it infinite is that it has no end in the other direction or, in other words, no beginning.¹⁶

So we have here what may be called the standard objection, according to which Kant confuses a series' being completed with its having both a starting and an ending point. On the Russell/Bennett/Moore reconstruction, Kant is thought to be arguing as follows:

- (1) If the past (the series of world-events in time) is eternal, an infinite series concluding with the present moment has been formed by successive synthesis; that is, it has been completed.
- (2) But for a series to be completed is for it to be bound on both ends.
- (3) Therefore, there must be a front end to the series of past events.
- (4) Therefore, the past has a beginning (in the finite past).

The objection, naturally, is that (2) begs the question: it is sufficient in this case that there only be one terminus, at the present moment.¹⁷ So even if it is granted that, given a starting point, one cannot form an actually infinite series by successive synthesis, this isn't a problem: the series of past events was always infinite. Thus Russell's conclusion: what he really proves is, at most, that if the world had no beginning, it must have already existed for an infinite time, the very conclusion Kant is trying to argue against in the thesis.¹⁸

In reply: a Defense of Kant

The thinkers above all grant that an infinite series cannot be formed by successive

synthesis (or successive addition), but think that this is not a problem for an infinite past, as the infinite series of past events was not formed (or at least not from a starting point) it was always infinite.

But this simply leads to a new problem. How, given an actually infinite number of past events, is it possible for the series to have reached the present moment? Indeed, it is not Kant but the objector who fails to take the absence of a starting point seriously. If it is impossible to traverse an actually infinite number of points given a starting point, how does such a task get easier in the absence of such a point?

Imagine, by way of illustration, that Hercules is assigned a thirteenth labor, but as a consolation he can choose which one he will attempt to fulfill; sadly, though, his choice is between climbing an infinitely tall mountain or climbing out of a bottomless pit. While both tasks are clearly impossible, Russell, Bennett and Moore would have us believe that climbing out of a bottomless pit is not only easier (on the dubious assumption that one impossibility can be less impossible than another one) but achievable, just as long as there is no place from which to begin climbing! But surely this is mistaken if Hercules has no place to even get started, climbing out must be an impossibility.

It might be replied that my example makes the same mistake as Kant's, as I am suggesting that Hercules must start climbing. To mitigate against this complaint, let me offer several responses. First, we could generously allow Hercules an infinite amount of time from the moment at which we drop him, or even suggest that he has been falling from all eternity. Needless to say, he won't be showing up at ground level any time soon...or ever. Against this, though, it might be complained that I've rendered the two cases disanalogous, since Hercules' task requires that he complete a task that has no endpoint

While Kant's argument for the antithesis has received far less criticism than his argument for the thesis, there is nonetheless some reason for pause. One standard criticism of the argument has been articulated by G. J. Whitrow, who argues that Kant's argument is a valid reason for rejecting the idea that the universe was created in time, but we are not compelled to accept his conclusion that the two arguments together imply that time does not pertain to the universe. Instead, we should prefer the solution that the world and time co-exist; that is, we should accept a relational theory of time.²² Jonathan Bennett has argued similarly, stating: from the impossibility of a premundane time I do not infer the impossibility of a first event. Rather, I infer that if there was a first event, it occurred at the first

Kant's and Allison's point, but that need not be the case, and it is certainly a matter of heated discussion.²⁷

Perhaps, then, the difficulty of speaking of a first event at a first time can be overcome but there is another problem: what if the beginning of the universe is caused? William Lane Craig writes,

either the necessary and sufficient conditions for the production of the first event are present from eternity or not. If they are, then the effect will exist from eternity, that is to say, the universe will be eternal. But if they are not, then the first event could never occur, since the necessary and sufficient conditions for the production of the first event could never arise. . . . The antithesis of the first antinomy . . . really asks, why did the universe begin to exist when it did instead of existing from eternity?²⁸

This is a strange way of putting the point. If there really is no time there's hardly any sense to asking why the universe began when it did. Presumably the contrast is not to its beginning to exist at some other time, but to its existing from eternity. But what precisely does that mean? Craig can't mean to refer to an everlasting past in this context, since that is a straightforward temporal reference. If eternity is supposed to refer to some distinct form of existence, then how is a temporal universe supposed to be able to exist from eternity?

Maybe it is best to think of the matter as follows. The transcendental realist will agree with Kant that every particular (space-time) event has a cause.²⁹ And whatever the cause of the first event turns out to be, it must either be a temporal cause or a cause that in some sense is outside the temporal matrix, with the effect's coming to be constituting the first moment of time. In either case, we can ask about the necessary and sufficient conditions for the effect's coming to be.

" I see no reason why any experience not subsumable under natural laws would be impossible or at least incoherent, and conclude that Kant has failed to prove the antithesis of the third antinomy. "

time.²³ Henry Allison has argued that this attempted way out of the antithesis argument is ultimately incoherent.²⁴ There is no difficulty with the notion of a first event, nor of a first time, but only of the conjunctive postulation of a first event at a first time. Since here 'event' means a change in the state of a thing, every event presupposes a prior time in which the thing existed in a different state.²⁵ Thus the best one can do is to have the first event occur at the second time, or no event occurring at the first time.

But why not define event more broadly? L. B. Lombard defines an event as anything that happens, an occurrence; something that occurs in a certain place during a particular interval of time.²⁶ Lombard acknowledges that for a long time the notion of an event seemed inextricably tied to that of change –

Let us consider the second case first, in which a non-temporal cause (where cause refers to an agent, not an event) brings about a temporal effect. Kant has shown in the thesis argument that the world must have had a beginning in time, and since it seems reasonable (with a second exception to be noted below) to think that Kant's argument gives good reason to suppose impossible a cause in an homogeneous empty time, then why not posit an atemporal cause? It is to be granted that such a cause is not (at least not qua atemporal) an object of possible experience, but again, since Kant is trying to offer independent confirmation of TI here, the transcendental realist can at least initially appeal to such a premise. And it does seem *prima facie* plausible that we can have knowledge of things we can not experience, non-Euclidean geometry and its application to our universe, for example. If so, then I suggest the following, modified version of Kantian empiricism: nothing can be an object of our knowledge if the evidence for its existence and nature cannot be a part of our experience.³⁰ Such a modification of Kant's system is significant, but is not a wholesale gutting by any means. In this way the pride of place is still given to Kant's Copernican Revolution with its emphasis on the contribution of the human knower to the objects and conditions of knowledge.

This is not to say that it isn't a serious challenge to Kant's view it is. But if (1) it allows us to have knowledge of things of which we are sure we have knowledge and could not otherwise support nor directly experience (e.g. non-Euclidean geometries, possibly the Categories themselves, etc.), (2) the Antinomies admit of satisfactory resolution within the transcendental realist rubric, and (3) if a relatively plausible answer can be given to Kant's argument for TI in the Aesthetic, then a modest empiricist TR such as the foregoing may be appropriate.³¹

This approach, whatever its other strengths and weaknesses, leaves a number of perplexities in its wake. Even if we posit an atemporal cause, we are left wholly in the dark as to its nature. And it is difficult to grasp the nature of atemporal action or what it could be, unless it is that the being proceeded from an unchanging state to a new one. But to talk in this way is consistent with speaking of a being in a sort of empty time, and questions about the necessary and sufficient conditions arise all over again. So: while I want to accord this option logical possibility, it is at the very least quite difficult to get any sort of handle on what sort of being or action might be applicable.³²

Accordingly, it is worth examining the first option mentioned above: a temporal first cause of the existence of the world. Kant's argument against this, recall, is that no coming to be of a thing is possible in an empty time, because no part of such a time possesses, as compared with any other, a distinguishing condition of existence rather than of non-existence; and this applies whether the thing is supposed to arise of itself or through some other cause (A427=B455). Kant is indeed correct in the case of event-event (or state-state) causation, but the doctrine of agent-causation offers a number of resources against this criticism.

On an event-causation model, the necessary and sufficient conditions for an effect are present in the dispositional causal powers of substances and the fully specifiable set of circumstances at the moment in question.³³ Given the necessity involved here, the homogeneity of empty time (or perhaps better, static or change-free time) renders an event causation model impotent to remedy the problem. On an agent causation model, however, spontaneous action is a possibility. Kant's near-contemporary, Thomas Reid, offered an account of agent-causation with the following three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions:

1. X is a substance that had power to bring about e.
2. X exerted its power to bring about e.
3. X had the power to refrain from bringing about e.³⁴

Action is thus up to the agent, and is not determined by scientific laws or some other element apart from the agent's undetermined will.³⁵ A final point. An agent's causing an event e is best understood as an instance of final causation: the agent is acting for a reason, where reasons are not understood as efficient but final causes. This response to Kant's antithesis argument offers a less mysterious but more ambitious alternative to acceding to antinomy than the previous suggestion; less mysterious, indeed, because we are at times aware of ourselves as such agents.³⁶ As it turns out, however, it runs into another of Kant's antinomies, and it is to this new argument that we must now turn.

The Third Antinomy

In the antithesis section of his Third Antinomy, Kant tries to prove that there is no freedom; instead, everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature.³⁷ Moltke S. Gram summarizes Kant's argument this way:

- (1) Assume a power of absolutely beginning a state, and, therefore, also of absolutely beginning a series of consequences of that state.
- (2) (1) is incompatible with the truth of the law of causality.
- (3) But (1) abrogates those rules through which alone a completely coherent experience is possible.
- (4) Therefore, (1) is false.³⁸

As Kant makes clear (A447=B475), nature implies the law of causality, and causality implies some sort of necessary connection between antecedent and consequent.³⁹ But

this is precisely what is missing in the case of agent causation, as there is nothing in the agent's state or circumstances at the moment of or just prior to the action which necessitates it. Therefore, agent causation is incompatible with nature, and thus with the conditions for completely coherent experience as well.

That agent causation is incompatible with natural law is not by itself a problem for the agency theorist; on the contrary, it is essential to her thesis that free human actions not be subsumable under natural laws. Further, it is important to keep in mind what is being explained here. The issue addressed in the theses of the first and third antinomies concerned the production of the world's first events that without which there would be no nature. So again, it's hardly an objection to note that (there is an instance of) agent causation which cannot possibly fall under the rubric of natural law, since what we are trying to explain is the origin of nature itself! It is only problematic if one assumes that we can only speak about nature.

Kant's argument for this claim is that without natural laws, the conditions for coherent experience are impossible, and if something is in principle incapable of being experienced (by us), it is not something about which we can competently speak or make knowledge claims. Unfortunately, this last point seems to involve a question-begging appeal to TI; at any rate, no independent argument is given for that conclusion.⁴⁰

Let us waive that point for now, though, and turn to the antecedent claim that if something does not fall under natural laws it cannot be (coherently) experienced by us. Why think that? Scientists have (indirect) experience of quantum particles which do not act according to strict natural laws; no one, as far as I know, would therefore claim that their experiences were incoherent.⁴¹ Indeed, the advocate of agent causation will insist that she is aware of herself precisely as a source of spontaneous

action not (completely) determined by natural laws. Perhaps she doesn't know this to be true (but only postulates it, as Kant suggests in the Critique of Practical Reason), or perhaps she is wrong about this some or even all of the time. Even so, her experience of herself as an apparently libertarian free agent is coherent, and seems to be the way a being that had such freedom would experience herself (on the assumption that she is mistaken in her self-attribution). To sum up, I see no reason why any experience not subsumable under natural laws would be impossible or at least incoherent, and conclude that Kant has failed to prove the antithesis of the third antinomy.

Conclusion

I have argued in the foregoing that Kant's attempt to indirectly prove the truth of transcendental idealism is not successful, at least with respect to the first and third antinomies. If my arguments are sound, then the antitheses of both antinomies fail to support their conclusions, provided Kant employs only premises accepted by the transcendental realist. This is not to say that TR is true, or even that it is coherent. My aim has been more limited: to show only that Kant has not in these passages at least delivered the *coup de grace* to transcendental realism.

On a final note, the results of the preceding discussion offer the transcendental realist with the makings of a proof for the existence of God. The thesis argument concludes that the world must have an external cause, and the resolution of the antithesis suggests without necessitating, since an unknowable noumenal cause is also a logical possibility that the cause of the world is an agent cause: a mind or a mind-like being. The full-fledged God of classical theism has not been demonstrated, nor has an Anselmian perfect being. Still, the result is an exciting one for theism, provided, once more, that the transcendental realist can offer a full-fledged response to the rest of the Critique. But that project must await another day.⁴¹

C

Notes

1 All quotations taken from Norman Kemp Smith's translation (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1929). Subsequent citations given in the text.

2 See e.g., the following passages from the Critique: A28-30/B44-45, A45-6/B62-3, A368-373.

3 A. C. Ewing comments on the antinomies that [t]hey indeed, if valid, not only corroborate but extend the argument for the subjectivity of space and time by showing not merely that we cannot justify our belief in their independent existence, but that this independent existence is impossible, since it would lead to contradiction. They thus supply something of which the lack has always been felt by critics of the Aesthetic and provide the only proof that reality cannot possibly be spatial and temporal, as opposed to proofs that we cannot know reality to be so or justify the belief that reality is so. (A Short Critique of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 208.)

4 See Hilary Putnam, Reason, Truth and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Nelson Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1978).

5 See e.g., the Meynellian point later on for further qualification. But the point is just about TR in the broadest sense.

6 See the references in note 31 for representatives of the transcendental realist approach.

7 With two provisos to be noted. First, TR is not going to include independence from God's mind; second, it won't include items like daydreams or hallucinations in other words, no empirically ideal objects.

8 See Henry E. Allison, Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic: An Interpretation and Defense (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1983), especially chs. 2 and 3.

9 Kant also argues for the limitedness and unlimitedness of space in the first antinomy, but for simplicity's sake I shall not address that issue.

10 Cited in Allison, p. 35.

11 Kant's own meaning of world in the context of T1 is of the series of all appearances. As T1 cannot be presumed in this setting, I offer a sense of the term which the transcendental realist would use as the appropriate TR counterpart.

12 Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (London and New York, Routledge, 1993), pp. 160-1.

13 I am assuming here the correctness of an A-theory (also known as the tensed theory) of time, according to which temporal becoming is a genuine feature of the world. For a defense of this view, see Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1992), and Quentin Smith, *Language and Time* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993).

14 Russell, p. 161.

15 Jonathan Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 118-9.

16 G. E. Moore, *Some Main Problems in Philosophy* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1953), p. 181, cited in Allison, p. 42.

17 One might object that even given two termini, one can still traverse an infinite, such as that of Zeno's paradoxes. But the sort of infinite in question there is not an actual infinite, but a potential infinite. There will always be a finite number of extended points between any two finitely separated termini, and since it is extended moments that are in question in the case of the past events of the world, Zenoic infinities do not come into play. For a detailed discussion of Zeno's paradoxes as they relate to the sort of argument under investigation, see William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (New York, Macmillan, 1979), appendix 1.

18 Allison seems to be making the same objection when he asks Why, after all, can't we simply think of this series as infinite in the sense of being closed at only one end, like the series of natural numbers, without also assuming (per impossible) that it somehow constitutes a 'totality'? (Allison, p. 44.) It is not clear to me whether he thinks this a different type of problem from the one raised above; in any case, the solution offered below addresses this objection in its various forms. (It might also be the case that he is confusing an actual infinite with a potential one see above.)

19 See e.g. Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic*, p. 121ff.

20 Nota Bene: By empty time all that I mean is a time in which there is no change, but not necessarily an absence of entities.

21 This point is a generalization of the difficulty as stated in the initial paragraph of this section. If time applies to things in themselves (and not just our experience), then one can ask about the series of events comprising the world's history, implying there is such a thing as the (spatio-temporal) totality of the world.

22 G. J. Whitrow, *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (London and Edinburgh, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961), p. 32.

23 Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic*, p. 160.

24 Allison, pp. 48-9.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

26 In Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa, eds., *A Companion to Metaphysics* (Cambridge, Basil Blackwell, 1995), S.V. event theory, p. 140.

27 See *ibid.*, pp. 140-4 for a layout of the relevant arguments and further references.

28 Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, p. 150.

29 At least in a rough and ready sense. The issue of agent causation shall be breached below, when that claim will have to be qualified somewhat, though not, perhaps, in spirit.

30 In his *Kant's Anaesthetic* (in *Philosophical Forum* 4 (1973): p. 348) Hugo Meynell argues for this more Thomistic theory over the Kantian view that nothing can be an object of our knowledge which cannot also be an object of our experience. Meynell notes three belief-candidates which he takes to support his evidence empiricism over the rival thesis: knowledge of other minds, the past, and the subject matter of nuclear physics. It seems to me unlikely, however, that any of these candidates will (or more modestly, need) be compelling to the Kantian. Regarding the first, Kant's disallowing that we have knowledge of a transcendental ego in our case renders it rather unlikely that he will approve it for everyone else. And while Kant will agree that the past qua past cannot be an object of our experience, past events were themselves capable of being experienced at one time, and that may perhaps be sufficient. Finally, while it is not clear to me that Kant can be a realist about quantum physics, there are non-Kantian philosophers who take an anti-realist position concerning subatomic particles as well. So it isn't clear that the problems Meynell raises are insuperable to T1; however, it seems to me that the case of non-Euclidean geometry does carry some axiological weight in the discussion in favor of evidence empiricism.

31 To do so is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. For one interesting attempt to provide a coherent alternative to Kant's transcendental idealism, see David Kelley, *The Evidence of the Senses: A Realist Theory of Perception* (Baton Rouge and London, Louisiana State University Press, 1986), chapter one. Kelley wishes to reject the move from the way we perceive the world is a function of our human cognitive faculties to, therefore, we are not entitled to speak of objects as they are apart from human cognition. Or perhaps it is better to say that the conclusion is ambiguous. We do not know things, e.g., from God's or a bat's perspective, but only from a human perspective, and so in that sense we can't speak of objects as they are apart from human cognition. But this is not to say, necessarily,

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that human cognitive faculties block us from getting at things as they really are. Our perceiving is finite and fallible, but that doesn't automatically preclude the possibility of getting it right. Another attempt, with which I am in basic agreement, is the Reidian approach presented in John Greco's and Reid's critique of Berkeley and Hume: *What's the Big Idea? Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LV (June 1995), pp. 279-296.

32 Of course, given the modified Kantian principle above, that may not be such a bad thing. In fact, it is to be expected on such a view that our knowledge of such a cause must be quite limited. So maybe it's not such a problem after all.

33 By substance I mean it on a standard transcendental realist construal as (a) that in which properties inhere, (b) a source of causal powers. Examples of substances include such entities as God, angels, humans and other living beings, and in a loose or analogous sense artifacts like tables, chairs, and computers.

34 From William L. Rowe, *Thomas Reid on Freedom and Morality* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 49. The account is extracted from Reid's letter of June 14, 1785 to Dr. James Gregory, and is developed in detail in his *Essays on the Active Powers*.

35 This is not to say that all human actions are free, or that the range of free actions is unlimited, or that persons are impervious to causally non-necessitating influences (in the ordinary sense of that phrase, not Leibniz' sense!). Rather, on those occasions where an agent does act freely, her act will be, within the parameters allowed by her character and circumstances, truly up to her *qua* agent, and will not be necessitated directly or indirectly by anything else.

36 I recognize that this isn't exactly a philosophical majority position. So here are three considerations in its favor. First, it does seem to be taken as a common-sense view by the non-philosopher; and it seems reasonable that pre-philosophical presuppositions should be awarded presumptive status in the absence of good reason to the contrary. Second, the dialectical situation of the anti-antinomist is such that if agent causation (which implies libertarian freedom) is so much as possible, then the First Antinomy fails as an independent argument for TI. Finally, an *ad hominem* argument: while the Kantian denies that we know we have freedom, she does accord it high epistemic status as a Postulate of Practical Reason. Thus agent causation seems to me a viable hypothesis for the Transcendental Realist, pending a knockdown argument to the contrary.

37 A445=B473. Since Kant is here speaking of what must be the case within the world, it is unclear that the line of argument in the text requires a response on this point. Nevertheless, it is desirable (a) in case the response is required, and (b) since the paper is broadly a defense of transcendental realism, it is worthwhile to say a few words in its support here as well.

38 Moltke S. Gram, *The Transcendental Turn: The Foundation of Kant's Idealism* (Gainesville, University Presses of Florida, 1984), p. 146.

39 Quantum indeterminacy may well be a problem for the Kantian (at least requiring some degree of revision in the claims about what nature requires), but for the sake of argument I allow the Kantian to have a satisfactory response here.

40 And it does need an argument, as other options are available (Kelley's evidence empiricism, for example see note 30).

41 It does not matter here whether the indeterminacy in question is ontological or only epistemological, since the issue here is epistemic. Nor does the direct/indirect distinction matter, since the physicist directly experiences the indeterminate effects of the quantum particles. One might object that in the quantum case, there are still conditions governing the particles behavior, albeit non-deterministically there are still probabilistic laws at work. But here too the agency theorist is on board, as she can admit that there are conditions surrounding one's free choices. My free decision to eat chicken rather than pasta for dinner doesn't imply that I might have had veal, mudpies, or videotape instead.

Love and the Underground Man

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Introduction

Of all Dostoevski's innovative works, perhaps none is more novel, more peculiar than his *Notes From the Underground*. Written in the first person but directed toward an audience, *Notes* appears to crash about, with the narrator shifting restlessly from viewpoint to viewpoint and mood to mood. Despite this erratic movement, once a reader has proceeded three-quarters of the way through the novel, he might grow used to the wild gyrations. Until, that is, the narrator delivers his love speech.

The love speech is indubitably the most peculiar portion of this peculiar novel. It leaves the reader astounded and in a state of wonder. How could the narrator, a noxious, little lunatic and self-described "mouse" and "scoundrel" speak such beautiful words? Why does he all but offer to marry this prostitute only to renege on these words and then revert to his cruel former self?

Unraveling this puzzle is the object of this essay. To do this, obviously, the speech must be put within the context of the novel as a whole. And so the paper shall proceed thus: Section 1 will be devoted to answering the question, "Who is the Underground Man and what is his sickness?". Section 2 describes three possible 'cures' for what ills the narrator. Section 3 will reveal the *raison d'être* of the love speech; and Section 4 will explain why the Underground Man (or narrator) disavows his love speech shortly after delivering it.

Section 1: The Underground Man: Who? What?

"And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this is also vexation of the spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

Ecclesiastes 1:17-18

"I am a sick man...I am a spiteful man." So begins *Notes From the Underground*. An odd introduction, for sure, but an accurate one. For *Notes* is the story of a sick and unhappy man. While the Underground Man is not any particular man, he is not a figment of Dostoevski's great imagination. Dostoevski's introductory note makes this clear:

The author of the diary and the diary itself are, of course, imaginary. Nevertheless it is clear that such persons as the writer of these notes not only may but positively must, exist in our society, when we consider the midst of which our society is formed...He is a representative of a generation still living. In this fragment, entitled 'Underground', this person introduces himself and his views, and, as it were, tries to explain the causes owing to which he has made his appearance and was bound to make his appearance in our midst.¹

// The simple point being that if it is the law of nature that all things have a cause, then how can there be an "I" which does anything? //

The Underground Man, while not a common man, nonetheless embodies the *geist* of the age. As Charles Guignon aptly notes, "Dostoevski's approach is to create characters which embody specific worldviews" the aim being to show "how such a viewpoint will pan out in action" and "whether or not the form of life [embodied] is viable or not."²

This said, we need now examine what the spirit of the times was. The notes are being written in the 1860's, when the waves of positivism and rational egoism were rolling over Russia from the West. Slowly but surely

the mechanistic worldview was taking hold among the Russian intelligentsia, appearing concretely in wildly popular works such as Chernyshevsky's socialist-utilitarian tract, *What Is To Be Done?*

It was the belief of men like Chernyshevsky that man was a creature that sought his own good, good being defined as that which increases his pleasure or decreases his pain. The organizing principle for society was to be the greatest good for the greatest number. And happiness was to be had when men reasoned properly, that is, when they partook in a kind of "hedonistic calculus", to use a familiar utilitarian phrase. In sum, Chernyshevsky and the like were a crude cross between Thomas Hobbes and John Stuart Mill, Benthamites of a sort.

This new philosophy horrified Dostoevski. Dostoevski was sufficiently perceptive to recognize that this new view was the beginning of the end of the Enlightenment. As Guignon puts it, "[t]he Enlightenment started out from the ideal of realizing paradise on earth through the discovery of objective truth. Yet this truth tended to undermine the evaluative commitments that motivated the Enlightenment project in the first place."³

This truth was that of the Newtonian universe, clockwork set in motion by God. To understand the workings of the universe one studied science, for the natural laws of motion were the invisible rulers of the phenomenal realm. Since man exists in this realm, the reformers endeavored to use material explanations to explain man's behavior. Turning to Hobbes, the first of the materialists and their intellectual forbear, the building blocks of their chilling worldview become manifest:

The passions that incline men to peace, are fear of death [and] desire of such things as are necessary to a commodious living...⁵

Liberty, or freedom, signifieth, properly, the absence of opposition; by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion.⁶

And yet because every action of a man's will, and every desire, and inclination proceedeth from some cause, and that from another cause, in a continual chain, whose first link is the hand of God the first of all causes, proceed from necessity. So that to him that could see the connexion of those causes, the necessity of all men's voluntary actions, would appear manifest.⁷

There are two types of voluntary motion [in man.] This endeavour, when it is toward something which causes it, is called APPETITE or DESIRE...And when the endeavour is forward something, it is generally called AVERSION.⁸

[L]ife itself is but motion.⁹

Indeed, Dostoevski hints that these reformers are Hobbes' sire. When the Underground Man states, "My life was even then, gloomy, ill-regulated, and as solitary as that of a savage" he sounds much like Hobbes' man in a state of nature.¹⁰

In sum, the Underground Man takes the mechanistic worldview seriously, that is, he takes it to be truth and so feels obliged to live according to that truth's ramifications. This truth holds that man is alone in the universe, either without a god or with one whom is no more than an original cause. As such, Dostoevski thinks, man would be little more than a billiard ball, an object like any other object, and one that's actions are controlled by the laws of nature. None are his own- all is cause and effect, cause and effect. How can he have free will? And what of a soul?

One can hardly come to pleasant conclusions about life when in the name of the Enlightenment's values of progress for the sake of happiness one discerns truth to be the ugly,

brute fact that a man is no more than an organism which seeks pleasure and hopes to avoid death, a creature impelled by natural forces with no free will, no choice of its own. So, the Underground Man goes underground, staying most of the day in his dark little apartment, reading, writing his notes or sitting with his hands folded, concluding that no action is worth taking because every action is intrinsically worthless and thus no better than any other. "You know that the direct, legitimate fruit of consciousness is inertia, that is, conscious sitting with hands folded" says the Underground Man to his readers; and,

[A]ll 'direct' persons and men of action are active just because they are stupid and limited [in reasoning ability]. How to explain that? I will tell you: in consequence of their limitation they take immediate and secondary causes for primary ones, and in that way persuade themselves more quickly and easily than other people do that they have found an infallible foundation for their activity...Where are the primary causes on which I am to build my foundations?¹¹

The simple point being that if it is the law of nature that all things have a cause, then how can there be an "I" which does anything? All is fate in such a worldview, and hence all action is not only futile but also determined and unfree. Such is the Underground Man's plight. He sits idly most of the days, going to work only because he needs to earn money to keep a roof over his head and food in his belly. Excepting time for sleep and dining, the rest of his time is spent railing against the ugly universe he occupies:

Upon my word, they (the utilitarian philosophers) will shout at you, it is no use protesting: it is a case of twice two makes four! Nature does not ask your permission, she has nothing to do with your wishes, and whether you like her laws or dislike them, you are bound to accept her as she is, and

consequently all her conclusions. A wall, you see, is a wall...and so on, and so on.

And,

Oh absurdity of absurdities! How much it is to understand all, to recognize all, all the impossibilities and the stone wall...brooding on the fact that there is no one even for you to feel vindictive against, that you have not, and perhaps never will have, an object for your spite.¹²

Most perverse of all is that the very faculty which was long held to make man greater than animals and which was to offer him joy through progress, reason, has left man in the worst of worlds. The man who reasons well (reasoning being understood as beginning with certain settled facts and proceeding from one consequence of these facts to another) ends up worse off than the fool who fails to use his reason well, who fails to understand the harsh conclusion of science and its logic.¹³ As the teacher in Ecclesiastes says, "in much wisdom is much grief". So what is to be done?

Section 2: Cures for His Ills?

What routes of escape are there for the Underground Man from this unlivable worldview? How can he find peace? To become stupid like those "men of action"? To forget what one knows? The Underground Man has tried this:

I want to tell you, gentlemen, whether you care to hear it or not, why I could not become an insect. I tell you solemnly, that I have many times tried to become an insect. But I was not even equal to that.¹⁴

The problem is, saving lobotomy, one cannot forget the truth. Once one stumbles upon the horror of reality, one is stuck with it. Since one cannot forget, the next logical possibility would be to prove your Hobbesian premises wrong. 'Strike at what most ill you, the laws

of nature!' the Underground Man seems to reason. For if you can assert your will, you not only have broken free of nature's laws, you've proven that you are a man. In his words,

[W]hat is a man without desires, without free will and without choice, if not a stop in an organ?¹⁵

And,

[T]here is one case, one only, when man may consciously, purposely desire what is injurious to himself, what is stupid, very stupid- simply in order to have the right to desire for himself...for in any circumstances it preserves for us what is most precious and most important- that is- our personality, our individuality."¹⁶

By behaving unreasonably or even self-destructively one interjects irrationality in to life, thereby, perhaps, proving one's freedom and being. Thus, the Underground Man begins purposely behaving in crazy ways. One night upon passing a tavern where a brawl is occurring, he enters the bar, hoping he would get brutalized and then thrown out the front window and in to the street. Unfortunately for him, instead of being beaten senseless and thrown out a window, the scene unfolded thus:

"But nothing happened. It seemed that I was not equal to being thrown out a window and I went away without having a fight. An officer put me in my place from the first moment. I was standing near the billiard table...blocking up the way, and he wanted to pass; he took me by the shoulders and without a word- without warning or explanation- moved me from where I was standing to another spot and passed by as though he had not noticed me. I could have forgiven blows, but I could not forgive his having moved me without noticing me."¹⁷

Here the narrator has failed utterly. He did not assert his will, as he sought. Worse, this large silent force, much like the laws of nature, denied him his wants, moved him as though he were an object, and took no notice of his existence as a man. The Underground Man is so enraged by this "insult" that he stalks the officer for two years and plans to exact his vengeance by bumping in to the officer during his regular afternoon stroll. Why? Because he believes that it will prove his freedom. To purposely bump a man of rank is not only to break the rules of good manners, but also invites a violent physical response. Such behavior is ostensibly unruly and not in one's self interest. But this is just what the Underground Man wants to defy, the contention that man is no more than an upright ape that seeks to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

Repeatedly he goes to the park and walks directly toward the officer, planning to run headlong in to him; but time and time again he steps aside at the last possible moment and lets him pass unmolested, then leaving the park for his dingy apartment, cursing himself for being again failing to assert himself. Eventually he does plow in to the officer, though he does not receive satisfaction because once again the officer refuses to notice him.

Unable to assert his will, the Underground man conceives of a second way to break free from his meaningless life. He will cease to be a stranger in his town and an isolated soul, and instead will force others to recognize him as a man and perhaps even find salvation in friendship. So once again the narrator emerges from his home after weeks of brooding and sets out to prove his individuality. First he decides to visit the home of a childhood schoolmate, Simonov. Unfortunately, Simonov has company, Ferfitchkin and Trudolyubov, who also are former schoolmates of the Underground Man (and who happen to despise him). Though

he let himself in to Simonov's apartment and then tried to interrupt their conversation, the three refused to acknowledge his existence:

"All of them took scarcely any notice of my entrance, which was strange, for I had not met them for years. Evidently they looked upon me as something on the level of a fly."¹⁸

Unlike his previous attempts to insult Zverkov and friends, his assault on Liza "was not merely sport". It was a violent, first act of tyranny.

Not caring much for his unwanted presence, the three friends busily discussed a party they were throwing the following day for another former classmate, Zverkov. During their talk, they declared aloud that with twenty-one rubles total (3 men, seven rubles each) they could throw Zverkov a fine party. This enraged the narrator because it showed that they refused to notice that there was a fourth man present, the Underground Man, who might want to join them. Infuriated, the narrator declared he would be join them and that he would see them at the party the next day, much to their displayed displeasure. His actions say, 'So what if Zverkov is "stupid", Ferfitchkin a "blockhead", and Trudolyubov a man who "was only capable of thinking of promotion [in the in the army]"!'. "Making them like me" and winning them in to "everlasting friendship" is my objective and I will not be denied'.¹⁹

So matters only become worse. The Underground Man attends the party, where Zverkov and the others first humiliate him by showing up at a tavern at 6:00 instead of 5:00 as he did and as was previously agreed (when asked why the Underground Man wasn't informed of the change of time for the party Simonov replied

"I forgot" seeming once again to deny recognition of the narrator). They also jeered at him, then ignored him, and then made him feel obliged to drink booze, something which made him even more hysterical.²⁰ The party is a total failure for the narrator. Even when he tries to insult the others or pick a fight, he is laughed at and demeaned.

This route of redemption failing, the Underground Man tries the most pathetic cure of all: romanticism. How better to free oneself from the pains of life than self-delusion, than reconstructing one's perceptions of the awful world in to a beatific vision? Therefore, he "invented adventures for [him]self and made up a life, so at least to live in some way."²¹ At other times he contemplated art and "the good and the beautiful", a phrase used to describe the natural beauty that one creatively perceives in the world, a willful ignoring of his Hobbesian first principles.²²

"But I had a means of escape that reconciled everything: that was to find refuge in 'the good and the beautiful', in dreams, of course. I was a terrible dreamer, I would dream for three months on end, tucked away in my corner..."²³

Indeed, sometimes his denial of reality took on psychotic proportions:

"I believed blindly at such times that by some miracle, by some external circumstance, all this would suddenly open out, expand...and I should come out in to the light of day, almost riding a white horse and crowned with laurel...I, for instance, was triumphant over everyone...I fell in love, came in to countless millions [of rubles], and immediately devoted them to humanity...[E]veryone would kiss me and weep (what idiots they would be if they did not), and I would go about barefoot and preaching new ideas...and the Pope would agree to retire from Rome to Brazil..."²⁴

Unfortunately for himself and Liza, as will be shown shortly, such delusions were only short-term fixes, imaginings which could not free him from his deterministic world. His ever-present reason and his brushes with the ugly world denied romanticism any lasting salubrious effect. Such was evident to both readers and himself when he stood outside the tavern, after the humiliating evening with Zverkov and friends. He was alone, broke, and in the cold night air:

"So this is it, this is it at last- contact with real life...This is very different from the Pope's leaving Rome and going to Brazil..."²⁵

Thus, he tried one last form of romanticism, one last way out of the underground: romantic love.

Section 3: The Love Speech

Some hours after the breakup of the Zverkov party the Underground Man delivers the love speech to Liza, a twenty-year old prostitute he had just bedded. In fact, the speech itself really is not a speech, nothing on the order of Pericles famed funeral oration or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. It is more like a brief, rambling, passionate lecture to this younger girl from this learned older man, her first customer. After describing in chilling detail the horrors of the life of a prostitute, the Underground Man warmly urges Liza to leave the brothel, because she is still "young" and "good looking". This being so, she might "love, be married, be happy."²⁶ Liza responded coldly to his suggestion, noting that not all married women are happy. His response is nothing short of extraordinary:

Not all [married women are happy], of course, but anyway it is much better than the life here. Infinitely better. Besides, with love one can live even without happiness. Even in sorrow life is sweet...

The narrator then realized,

I was no longer reasoning coldly. I began to feel to myself what I was saying and warmed to the subject. I was already longing to expound the cherished ideas I had brooded over in my corner. Something had suddenly flared up in me.²⁷

Here it is critical to note two things. First, the Underground Man's entire tone has turned from one of spite and misery to one of optimism, of belief, and connected, is that love is understood as a way out of misery. It is a kind of salvation, a *modus vivendi* that the narrator sees as a cure for his ills and a path out of the brothel for Liza. Though love might not bring happiness, it can make life livable—and that is what counts. But how does romantic love (as opposed to familial love or Christian love) make life livable?

Perhaps romantic love provides an identity for one self: Who am I? I am the lover and beloved of _____ (fill in the blank). Also, romantic love gives to oneself an affirmation of one's very being and uniqueness, e.g. 'My lover did not choose anyone else, she chose me, because I am special, I am me'. Finally, romantic love offers a person an organizing principle for one's life: to please another, to devote oneself to another. Romantic love makes sense of a senseless universe by giving a person something to commit to, an outlet for the volcano of emotions within framework of simple actions. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard asked, "Please tell me Lord, what ought I to do?" The romantic has a quick answer for this: love your beloved. For this reason, the Underground Man says, "where there is no love, there is no sense."²⁸

The Underground Man continues:

[I]f all goes well with the family, if the blessing of God is upon it, if the husband is a good

one, loves you, cherishes you, never leaves you! There is happiness in such a family! Even sometimes there is happiness in the midst of sorrow; and indeed sorrow is everywhere. If you marry you will find out yourself. But think of the first years of married life with one you love: what happiness, what happiness there sometimes is in it!"²⁹

Working himself in to frenzy he reaches new heights:

Love is a holy mystery...The first phase of married love will pass, it is true, but then there will come a love that is better still. Then there will be the union of souls, they will have everything in common, there will be no secrets between them.³⁰

After a brief description of the joys of parenthood, the Underground Man ends his speech, leaving Liza and readers shocked. Recalling that the Underground Man had earlier mentioned that he had cold parents who packed him off for boarding school at a young age, never to see him again, and considering that he had never been married or even knew anyone married, one must ask, how would he know these things? Liza is right when she replies to his passionate lecture with the calm observation, "Why, you...speak somehow like a book."³¹

That is the fact of the matter. As a bookish man who spent his days reading and contemplating, the Underground Man had come in contact with romantic idealism that swept over Russia in the 1840's, just before the coming of Chernyshevsky and utilitarianism. His speech on love was an idea, and one that excited him because it seemed to offer salvation from the nihilistic life.

Unfortunately, this attractive solution to the problem of the Enlightenment and the Underground Man's ills failed. As many commentators have observed, the Romantic

attempt to rescue liberalism from itself has failed the West; and in this case, the Underground Man.

Section 4: The Rebuking of Liza

"You don't know what this woman is...This is everything"

The Underground Man³²

Shortly after Liza noted that the narrator spoke "like a book", an "evil feeling took possession" of him. Turning once again to the life of a whore, he tells Liza that her future will be nothing but agony, that it would be better for her to die now than to live as a prostitute. Seeing her begin to lose her composure, to admit that he was right, he moves in for the kill. He tells her a ghastly story about a young whore who ended up mad and drunk, sitting out on a frozen doorstep, holding a dead fish and being taunted by drunken soldiers. This will be Liza's future, the narrator insists. Liza breaks down in tears and the Underground Man feels he has won a victory: he has broken her, forced her to confront what he believes will be the truth. Unlike his previous attempts to insult Zverkov and friends, his assault on Liza "was not merely sport". It was a violent, first act of tyranny.

Dostoevski believed that when man refuses to believe in God, he inevitably will become either a slave to another person or he will set himself up as God.³³ Being an egoist and an older man of greater learning and hence power, the narrator became the latter. He then tells her that were she not a whore, he might fall in love with her. He gives her his address, invites her to visit him, and then departs. The point being that if she wants to escape this hell, like Christ, only he is the way and the path: "I, for instance, became the salvation of Liza."³⁴ As he strolled home from the brothel the Underground Man recognized what he was doing, for though he cared for her he could see that behind his compassion for her was the "loathsome truth."³⁵

So, despite spending the next few days dreaming of the two of them falling in love, of living abroad, and having a joyous life, he knew that should Liza come to visit him, he would defile her. He would do so, because he could not believe his own romantic illusions about reality. As a creature of the time, he was a Hobbesian, a hardheaded realist. As such a man, he couldn't believe in a happy ending. There was no joy to come. Life was a "nasty, brutish, and short" experience. Man is inevitably a lonely creature and an awful egoist. "I know that I am a blackguard, a scoundrel, an egoist."³⁶

Through a perverse twist of logic, the Underground Man's mind decided that while all action is futile, he needn't sit with hands folded. Instead, he can do what every rational man does, please himself. How better to please oneself than to satisfy one's craving for more power, more control, than to tyrannize? Fancying himself an earthly, vengeful God, he hopes to hold Liza over the pit of hell, hint that he might save her, and then drop her in to the pit. Through such cruelty he can assert his will, prove that he exists, that he isn't a mere organ stop.

In the entire novel's most disturbing scene, he attempts this. When Liza visits he works himself in to an insane frenzy. He shrieks at his manservant, threatens to kill him, and in doing so terrifies Liza. He then manages to bed her. Shortly after sex, his mood turns hideous and he mocks her, telling her that he did not care for her, he just wanted to tyrannize over her, "power, power is what I wanted...I wanted to wring out your tears, your humiliation, your hysteria...!"³⁷

Though hurt by his words, she stays, facing him with a countenance of compassion. Surprised by her response, his madness abates and he then has his most profound revelation: "Liza...understood a great deal more than I imagined. She understood from

all this what a woman understands first of all, if she feels genuine love, that is, that I myself was unhappy."³⁸

The narrator then broke down. The two embraced and wept as one. In a remarkable twist, Liza had endured his insults and like Christ, turned the other cheek and given him unconditional love. Unlike he, the romantic lover, the egotistical, vain man whose opinion of himself and his very being depended upon another's recognition (be it Zverkov and the others, or be it Liza's), who wanted love because it served the purpose of giving him the recognition that the cold godless universe wouldn't; Liza's love was true and selfless. In this stunning scene we see Dostoevski's final indictment of the Romantic project to rescue the Enlightenment from self-destruction; here we see Dostoevski damn the attempt to derive human connectedness and kindness from the liberal premises of natural loneliness and egoism and offer a Christian alternative. Unfortunately, as a distilled version of the man of the times, the Underground Man is too sick to embrace the cure to his illness provided by Liza's example, that of selfless, Christ-like love. He quits sobbing. Feeling humiliated because he appears weak, not like a powerful God, he begins again toward his goal of tyranny. Realizing that he was "incapable of loving her", understanding love in fact not as beatific romantic visions but as an selfish struggle, he remains silent until she decides to leave. He then follows after her, insultingly shoves money in her hand, and turns away.

Conclusion

The Underground Man was a man of his times, a man who wholeheartedly believed in the basics premises of the Enlightenment and its liberal politics. Because he much more clearly saw their logical conclusions, he was a perverse character, one that appeared to be an anomaly, but was in fact most representative of his society. The life he lived

was torturous. Since he made certain assumptions about the universe (godless, ruled by natural laws such as causation) he came to certain conclusions about life, namely, that it was pointless, that it was determined, and that it was hell for those who perceived it for what it was.

Despite his assumptions about man's unfreedom, the Underground Man was sufficiently unhappy with his life that he attempted to improve it. First he sought to disprove the laws of nature by exerting his will, the presumption being that if he disproved natural laws he could rid himself of the odious wall which barked at him "twice two is four" and reclaim his individuality, his freedom.

Failing at that, the Underground Man then attempted to gain recognition as a man. Fleeing his apartment and self-imposed isolation chamber, he went out among the "blockheads" and "fools" looking for affirmation. Unable to get recognition of his individuality from the universe, he asked for it from others. Unfortunately, because he was a grotesque of liberal individualism's premises, everyone he met found him noxious or laughable, and so refused to give him any sort of respect.

Finally the Underground Man tried various forms of Romanticism. Sometimes he imagined he was living a great life. Other times he construed the world to be better than it was, a place where one can dwell in the "good and beautiful". But these attempts were in vain and so he turned to romantic love. Romantic love was to provide salvation for him, a happy conclusion based upon his dearly held Hobbesian assumptions. The Underground Man's disastrous experience with Liza was the failure of the Romantic project writ small, a demonstration by personal example. Having assumed away God, Dostoevski declares that it is only logical that man makes himself either a slave

or a God. In the former case, man turns to another for recognition of his existence as a man and not a mere piano key; the result being that his entire being and life are dependent upon the will and whim of another (slavery). In the latter case, man's ego takes on monstrous proportions. Feeling both that anything is permissible and that life consists in exertion of the will, such a man in the name of reclaiming his existence as a man behaves in beastly ways, tyrannizing over others and delighting in his power.

The Underground Man's love speech is of interest for two reasons. First, it expresses what Dostoevski believed to be a verity of man *qua* man: the need for belief in his freedom to choose, which is the essence of humanity, because it stands in contrast to natural laws and mere instinct. Yes, even the Underground Man, a man who embodied the principles of utilitarianism, principles that when taken to their logical conclusions deny man individuality, believed or at least desired to believe otherwise. Otherwise there would have been no crazy exploits, no novel. Secondly, the love speech shows the failure of the Romantic attempt to rescue liberalism from itself. If mankind is believes that men are rotten, egocentric, power mongers, then trying to convince them to love one another is futile. Community, contrary to Rousseau's heroic efforts, can't be created from disparate, self-absorbed atoms.

In the end, Notes From the Underground warns us that when man rejects God, he rejects man; for freedom requires the ability to chose, the ability to be responsible for one's deeds. Once man is understood as determined, he has lost his special place in the universe. According to Dostoevski, those who believe the principles of Newtonian science and the ethics of Hobbes are bound to live miserably, wheeling around and around, trapped in their closed circuit world view, like the Underground Man, who at the end of the novel we are told is unable to quit writing his notes.

Dostoevski uses the love speech and the ensuing action to contrast the beauty of romantic words and ideas with the brutality of their effects. Thus, Dostoevski exclaims, there can be no peace between men unless the intellectual paradigm of Hobbes and the Enlightenment is discarded and replaced by a new understanding of life, one like that put forth by Christ.³⁹ This is the message of Notes From the Underground for which the love speech provides the key.⁴⁰

C

Notes

- 1 Fyodor, Dostoevski, *Notes From the Underground*, in Irving, Howe, *Classics of Modern Fiction*, (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968).
- 2 Charles, Guignon, *The Grand Inquisitor* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co., 1993), p. 13.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. xi, xii.
- 4 *Ibid.*, xvii.
- 5 Thomas, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ed. by Michael Oakeshott (New York, MacMillan Publishing Co., 1962), p. 102.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 160.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 10 Fyodor Dostoevski, *Notes From the Underground*, p. 42. Compare with Hobbes, p. 100.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 13 Hobbes, p. 42.
- 14 Howe, p. 16.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 63.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 22 This notion of Romanticism being a matter of creative perception is well explained by Lascales Abercrombie in *Romanticism*, (London, Martin Secker, 1926).
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 52-5.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 31 Compare with Dostoevski's own words in a letter to one of his lovers: "[Y]ou are my whole future- my hope and faith and happiness and bliss- everything." Quoted in David Magarshack, *Dostoevsky* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962), p. 265.
- 32 Howe, p. 89.
- 33 This point is well explained in both the Guignon text and Nicholas Berdyaev's *Dostoevsky*, translated by Donald Attwater, (Cleveland, World Publishing Company, 1957). This theme is common in Dostoevski's works (see *The Possessed*, *The Brother's Karamazov*- especially the section on the Grand Inquisitor).
- 34 Howe, p. 95.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 39 Berdyaev and Guignon have done an excellent job at explaining this point.
- 40 As many authors have pointed out, government censors for reasons unclear removed a critical portion of *Notes From the Underground*, the part where the *Underground Man* comes to understand that the thought of the day was a horrible trap that could be escaped only by a rejecting Enlightenment and accepting Christ. Liza's reaction to the narrator's insults was to supply the experience which gave him this insight.

Book Reviews

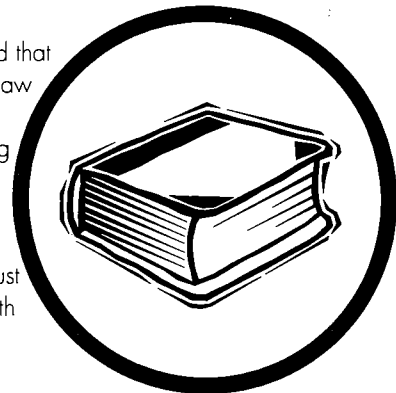
A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law
by Antonin Scalia
Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997.

It is a rare opportunity to learn a sitting Supreme Court Justice's thoughts on jurisprudence and the state of the judiciary. Typically, members of the Court say little publicly about their work, preferring to shroud their activities. By keeping aloof the Court puts forth the image of being above politics, thereby enabling them to retain their unelected, anti-democratic position. One can only guess that Scalia was willing to pen this text and perhaps imperil the Court's legitimacy because he believed that something in the judicial process had gone very wrong and the public need notified.

In this slim text, Justice Scalia first offers a withering critique of the method of adjudication most judges and justices of the appellate courts employ. Scalia then provides what he believes is the proper method for deciding a case. His essay is a tight and easily read forty-five pages. After this the reader is treated to replies and rebuttals by a fine cast of scholars: historian Gordon Wood, Harvard Law Professors, Laurence Tribe and Mary Ann Glendon, and Ronald Dworkin, Professor of Law at New York University. Scalia then briefly replies to these essays. Professor Amy Gutman of Princeton provides a laconic summary introduction.

Justice Scalia attacks two approaches to common law statutory interpretation, which he labels "original intent" and the "living Constitution." While the method of original intent seeks to understand the law by referring to what the legislators had in their minds at the time they enacted the law, the living constitution approach seeks to treat the law as embracing unwritten general principles of political morality, the contours of which morph over time.

Scalia derides original intent because it is a method that enables justices to concoct an interpretation of the law that serves as a shroud for their personal policy predilections. This happens in roughly the following manner: though the law may say that "no person shall do X", I as a justice might personally feel that the person (Y) arrested for doing X ought not be prosecuted or convicted because the law is an unjust law or that I, for whatever reason, feel empathy with



Y. Therefore, I pluck snippets of speeches from the Congressional Record wherein some lone Congressman disparaged the idea of passing a law against X if it might affect a person like Y. I then issue a decision, which declares that the original intent behind the law clearly did not aim for persons like Y to be punished for doing X. *Voilà!* Legislative will is blocked by judicial ukase.

Thus, Scalia notes, we have infamous decisions like the 1892 case, *The Church of Holy Trinity v. United States*. Trinity Church had contracted with an Englishman to come to be their rector and pastor. This blatantly violated a federal statute forbidding anyone to assist or encourage the migration of any person to the U.S. to perform labor or service of any kind. However, the Supreme Court declared that the church was innocent of wrongdoing, for though the letter of the law was broken, the spirit or original intent was not.

Scalia's spite toward the living constitution approach is well illustrated by Justice Brennan's use of it in the case of *Gregg v. Georgia* (1976). Georgia sought to execute Gregg for murder. The majority of the Court noted that Amendments V and XIV of the Constitution declare that "no man may be held in jeopardy of life or limb without due process of law", the implication being that he *may* be held of jeopardy of life or limb if due process was followed. In tandem with the fact that murderers had been executed since the American founding, it was obvious that Georgia could rightly put Gregg to death. Wrong, said Justice Brennan and his liberal soul mate, Thurgood Marshall in dissent. The Eighth Amendment's provision against cruel and unusual punishment forbade executing a murderer. Never mind that the Eighth Amendment had never been understood to deny states the right to put persons to death for murder, Brennan claimed that our evolving standards of morality transformed the meaning of "cruel and

unusual" to include the death penalty. Again, cries Scalia, a jurist is usurping legislative power.

Scalia finds both the original intent and evolving constitution methods of interpretation inherently undemocratic because they so easily enable judges to create the law instead of interpreting it. Scalia writes,

If the courts are free to rewrite the Constitution anew, they will, by God, write it the way the majority wants; the appointment and confirmation process will see to that. This, of course, is the end to the Bill of Rights, whose meaning will be committed to the very body it was meant to protect against: the majority.¹

While Scalia is correct that the Constitution is a bulwark which aims to keep democratic methods from leading to illiberal results, the fact of the matter is the from 1935 to 1980 the majority of what he would call "bad" decisions were handed down to the chagrin of the majority. It was not the case that the Supreme Court was a tool of the majority but that they were pushing the agenda of minorities. When Justice Blackmun invented the right to an abortion, he was not acting as a tool of the majority. In fact, in 1972 when he penned the decision of *Roe v. Wade* only a minority of Americans agreed that laws limiting or banning abortion were unconstitutional.

The obvious question to be asked is how did the sorry state of statutory and constitutional interpretation come about. Scalia believes the culprit is the common law training of lawyers, which is to say the law schools are to blame.

[I]f you go into a constitutional law class, or study a constitutional law casebook, or read a brief filed in a constitutional law case, you will rarely find the discussion addressed to the text of the constitutional provision that is at

issue...The starting point of the analysis will be cases, and the new issue will be presumptively be decided according to the logic that those cases expressed, with no regard for how far that logic, thus extended, has distanced us from the original text and understanding.²

To see how this occurs, consider the protests raised by NOW and abortion rights activists when states attempted to require teenagers seeking abortions to first notify their parents. They said that parental notification laws were unconstitutional, a violation of the right to an abortion. Of course they cited *Roe v. Wade*. As noted above, in *Roe v. Wade* the Supreme Court declared for the first time that a woman had a right to an abortion. The basis of their claim was the right to privacy. Scanning the Constitution one can find no mention of a right to privacy, so whither this right? Well, seven years prior to *Roe* the right had been created in the case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*. Here Justice Douglas and a few colleagues decided that they disliked a state law that outlawed the distribution of contraception to married persons. So they found it unconstitutional on the basis of the right to privacy, a right they cooked up. A few years later in the *Eisenstadt* decision they declared the same right for unmarried persons. *Griswold* begat *Eisenstadt* and *Eisenstadt* begat *Roe* and so forth.

How to stop or retard this process? Scalia prescribes that judges take up (and law schools teach) the interpretive method he calls textualism. Textualism is a simple method: one looks at the text and then tries to discern the meaning of the words within the whole of the law. The aim is to understand what these words would mean to your average citizen at the time they were made law. Philosophers, of course, will hem and haw that something so simple was utterly impossible. One only wonders why they then bother to read street signs, menus, instruction booklets, and thick texts by post-

structuralists if it is impossible to find what text means.

Bucking post-modernism, Scalia writes that there is only a range of correct readings of a statute's language. For example, Article I, section 9 says, "No bill of attainder or ex post facto law may be passed." Through law books of the era we can learn what these words mean and therefore understand what this article meant when it was made part of the Constitution. Case decisions may be employed but only as an adjunct. This keeps the Bench from straying far from the Constitution itself.

Obviously interpreting statutes or the Constitution is not always so easy. Take the First Amendment's protection of the freedom of the press and speech. Can Congress pass a law prohibiting persons from writing letters? Scalia writes, "surely there is no doubt they [letters] cannot be censored. In this constitutional context, speech and press, the two most common forms of communication, stand as a sort of synecdoche for the whole."³ So letter writing cannot be banned, but, say, nude dancing can.

Scalia does not give readers precise rules for textualism. He does not try, as the medieval jurists did, to fashion rules of logic or interpretive tools. This is unfortunate, for it makes it difficult for a judge or budding law student to become textualists. What sources may one use to determine the commonsensical understanding of a law? What if the law was not one that affected the common man, but one which dealt with antitrust and therefore was only to be read by lawyers and the elite of the business community? These are but a few of the questions which one would hope to see addressed in a much, much longer treatise one day. Without further instruction on how to be a textualist, though few sitting judges are likely to become textualists. In which case, nothing will change.

This brings up a deeper problem. If the problem of interpretation is one of methods, let us imagine that Scalia produces a treatise on textualism. Two things must then happen. First, this method must become the method taught in law school. Second, those who learn this method must use it faithfully. Assuredly the former is improbable, but the latter is especially unlikely. For if it is the case as Scalia says, that self-righteous judges are trying to push their politics under the cloak of law, what is to keep them from doing so via textualism? Maybe it will not be as easy or blatant. However, Scalia fails to persuade that good method will prevent jurists' personal politics from manifesting themselves as law.

Though space does not permit lengthy consideration of the others' essays and Scalia's rejoinders, a few brief observations can be offered. The weakest piece is Tribe's, which brings such hearty skepticism to bear on the notion of discerning a law's meaning that he leaves the potential interpreter of the Constitution with no guidelines as to undertake the venture. Tribe refuses to elaborate the proper approach and proffers but this:

To prevent that interpretive task from degenerating into the imposition of one's personal preferences one must avoid all pretense that it can be reduced to a passive process of discovering rather than constructing an interpretation; and replace such pretense with a forthright account, incomplete and inconclusive though it might be, of why one deems his or her proposed construction of the text to be worthy of acceptance, in light of the Constitution as a whole and the history of the Constitution.⁴

Setting aside the vagueness of all this and its ten-step-program tone, Tribe's method cannot distinguish good interpretation from bad. Justice Taney's twisted interpretation of the IV Amendment (that slaves were slaves no matter what) passes muster with Tribe provided Taney

was speaking as an authentic individual⁵. Wood's contribution is of modest value. Casting an eye back to colonial and early America, Wood attempts to show that the problem Scalia is contending with (judicial power and democratic rule) "is one deeply rooted in our history, and as such it is probably not as susceptible to solution as he implies."⁶ While Wood might be correct, he simply cannot prove his case in the fifteen pages he offered or was permitted to offer. One hopes that he or another equally fine scholar takes up this study in a two or three hundred page text.

The strongest essays are those by Glendon and Dworkin. With wit Glendon joins Scalia in lamenting the common law approach to statutory and constitutional interpretation. Glendon points to German and other continental approaches to law to show wherein Americans might find suggestions for reform.

Dworkin's rebuttal and Scalia's subsequent response are gems. Spending time to define and debate types of originalist interpretation (semantic originalism vs. expectation originalism), the two thinkers parry and thrust at one another in an aggressive but respectful manner. Though Dworkin shows that Scalia's textualism needs more systematic explication, he is unable to demolish it. Ultimately the two appear to irrevocably split as to whether the Constitution was originally understood as declaring moral principles, with the particular liberties of these principles properly being enunciated differently through the passing of time (Dworkin); or if it is a document that declares principle but also protects certain immutable particular liberties which no future political organ can rightly take away (Scalia).

Wherever one comes down in this debate, assuredly both the lay citizen and the scholar can find much of value in this volume. Considering the power held by America's

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judges, if not civic responsibility, then self-interest should compel one to carefully read and consider the ideas expressed in this volume.

C
Notes

1 *A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law* by Antonin Scalia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 47.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

5 *Dredd Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393, 450 (1857).

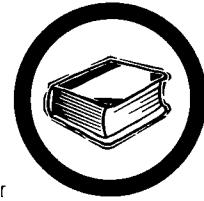
6 Gordon Wood, in Scalia, p. 58.

• *Kevin R. Kosar, New York University*

Real Love: In Pursuit of Cultural Justice
by Andrew Ross
New York, New York University Press, 1998

One unfamiliar with Professor Ross might be inclined to believe that *Real Love* was a piece of satire, some sort of spoof on leftist scholarship cooked up by R. Emmitt Tyrell or some other wag of the far right. With its pink cover, its pretentious title claim (that real love is the province of the left, that real love is first and foremost a sanguine, sentimental feeling of understanding and acceptance), *Real Love* is bound to displease those left, right, and center.

The serious minded on the left will be embarrassed, for this sort of blatantly politicized scholarship is precisely the kind that the left need abandon in order to reconstruct itself; ecce Richard Rorty's clarion call to dump the nutty orthodoxy of the academic, cultural left and to return to the more clear-headed ideas of Emerson, Dewey, the like.¹



Those on the right will giggle or shriek at Ross' bizarre insistence that DNA and other scientific evidence ought to have been barred from the O.J. Simpson trial, his peculiar interest in all matters that involve 'marginalized' groups (read, non-heterosexual and/or non-Caucasians), and his general disposition which celebrates *les miserables* and condemns anything that bears the least semblance of middle America. Call him the Anti-Babbit.

Those in the middle will either ignore Ross or be severely disappointed. For the topic of justice, typically conceived in the Occident as abstract and impartial, versus culture, which implies particularism and partiality, is both tricky and extraordinarily relevant, as America becomes a more ethnically diverse nation-state. How to reconcile, for example, the state's demand that all children attend public school from ages five to eighteen with an ethnic and/or religious group's desire to educate their own? The facile answer has been to allow those parents wealthy enough to pay for private schooling to do so, but force those who aren't to send their children to public schools- a policy which is blatantly classist and perhaps offensive to the notion of equality before the law. To take another example, is it just for the state of Illinois to jail a man because he followed his culture's tradition by wedding a girl not eighteen years of age and consummating the marriage? And what of the English-first and English-only movements? Beneath these issues lurks another immense question- how much of his cultural identity can an individual be rightly or fairly asked to concede in exchange for American citizenship? So much to ponder...

Yet Ross does not bother with these weighty questions. Happily confident that a warm, fuzzy moral relativism is the answer, Ross treats the matter as a mop up mission, an effort to reiterate the right

answer while eradicating or at least exposing the infidels. Therefore, the first eight essays effect to raise the reader's consciousness of marginalized persons' lifestyles and worldviews (e.g., Chicago gangstas) and breakdown his ability to critically judge them. Simultaneously, as is oft the case with the new academic left, Ross tries to work the reader into a frothing loathing of those less enamoured of deviant or self-destructive behavior.

Only when the one reaches the final essay, "Claims for Cultural Justice", does he get the feeling that Ross is going to take his avowed topic head-on. Sadly, though, it is a feint. In these twenty-seven pages Ross bounces about a bevy of topics (NAFTA, O.J. Simpson, oppression, to name a few) and per usual takes the time to pillory those who disagree with him (e.g., calling the late Richard Lewin, co-author of *The Bell Curve*, a "quack"). Again, the all-important extended discussion of reconciling culture and justice never materializes.

Those few who enjoy radically politicized scholarship of this stripe will whoop and cheer, for Ross toots their tune. Those looking for more will likely find *Real Love* time ill spent.

C

Notes

¹ Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Century*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998).

• *Kevin R. Kosar, New York University*

Philosophical Chicken

Beginning with Socrates, philosophers have long proclaimed themselves the wisest of all. Therefore it is fitting that we pose to them that most vexatious question of all: Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road?

Plato: For the greater good.

Karl Marx: It was a historical inevitability.

Bertell Ollman (renown scholar of Marx): It did so because of its internal relation to the road.

Machiavelli: So that its subjects will view it with admiration, as a chicken which has the daring and courage to boldly cross the road, but also with fear, for whom among them has the strength to contend with such a paragon of avian virtue? In such a manner is the princely chicken's dominion maintained.

Hippocrates: Because of an excess of black bile and a deficiency of choleric humour.

J. Derrida: Any number of contending discourses may be discovered within the act of the chicken crossing the road, and each interpretation is equally valid as the authorial intent can never be discerned, because structuralism is DEAD, DAMMIT, DEAD!

Nietzsche: Because if you gaze too long across the Road, the Road gazes also across you.

B.F. Skinner: Because the external influences which had pervaded its sensorium from birth had caused it to develop in such a fashion that it would tend to cross roads, even while believing these actions to be of its own free will.

Carl Jung: The confluence of events in the cultural gestalt necessitated that individual chickens cross roads at this historical juncture, and therefore synchronicitously brought such occurrences into being.

J.P Sartre: In order to act in good faith and be true to itself, the chicken found it necessary to cross the road.

L. Wittgenstein: The possibility of "crossing" was encoded into the objects "chicken" and "road", and circumstances came into being which caused the actualization of this potential occurrence.

Diogenes Laertius: Who cares?

Montaigne: In order to find a true friend.

Augustine: He hoped to enter the kingdom of God.

Aristotle: To actualize its potential.

Buddha: If you ask this question, you deny your own chicken-nature.

David Hume: Out of custom and habit.

Epicurus: For fun.

Kant: because it was categorically imperative

Ralph Waldo Emerson: It didn't cross the road; it transcended it.

Johann von Goethe: The eternal hen-principle made it do it.

Pyrrho the Skeptic: What road?

Henry David Thoreau: To live deliberately...and suck all the marrow out of life.

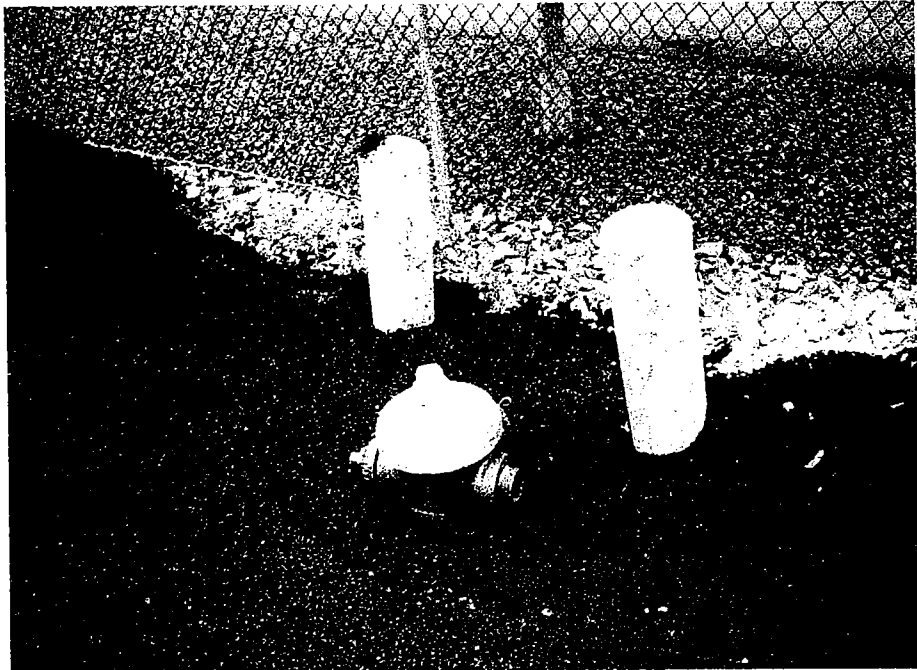
Zeno of Elea: To prove it could never reach the other side.

Special thanks to David Chalmers (<http://ling.ucsc.edu/~chalmers/phil-humor.html>) and the anonymous denizens of the World Wide Web who contributed to this list.

HUMOR

Parting Shot

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